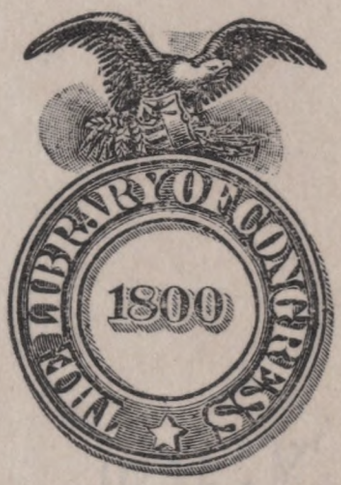

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Braine, Mrs. Charlotte Mary

WIFE IN NAME ONLY.

BY

BERTHA M. CLAY. pseud.

AUTHOR OF

"A Dark Marriage Morn," "A Broken Wedding-Ring,"
"Dora Thorne," "Wedded and Parted,"
"From Out the Gloom," Etc.

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WIFE IN NAME ONLY.

CHAPTER I.

It was the close of an autumn day, and Dr. Stephen Letsom had been standing for some time at his window watching the sun go down. It faded slowly out of the western sky. There had been a golden flush with the sunset which changed into crimson, then into purple, and finally into dull gray tints that were forerunners of the shades of night. Dr. Stephen Letsom had watched it with sad, watchful eyes. The leaves on the trees had seemed to be dyed first in red, then in purple. The chrysanthemums changed color with every phase of the sunset; there was a wail in the autumn wind as though the trees and flowers were mourning over their coming fate. There was something of sadness in the whole aspect of nature.

The doctor evidently shared it. The face looking from the window was anything but a cheerful one. Perhaps it was not the most judicious manner in which the doctor could have spent his time—above all, if he wished to give people an impression that he had a large practice. But Dr. Letsom had ceased to be particular in the matter of appearances. He was to all intents and purposes a disappointed man. Years before, when his eyes were bright with the fires of youth, and hope was strong in his heart, he had invested such money as he possessed in the purchase of a practice at Castledene, and it had proved to be a failure—why, no one exactly knew.

Castledene was one of the prettiest little towns in Kent. It had a town-hall, a market-place, a weekly market, and the remains of a fine old castle; but it was principally distinguished for its races, a yearly event which brought a great influx of visitors to the town. It was half buried in foliage, surrounded by dense woods and green hills, with a clear, swift river running by. The inhabitants were divided into three distinct classes—the poor, who gained a scanty livelihood by working in the fields,

the shop-keepers, and the gentry, the latter class consisting principally of old maids and widows, ladies of unblemished gentility and limited means.

Among the latter Dr. Letsom was not popular. He had an unpleasant fashion of calling everything by its right name. If a lady would take a little more stimulant than was good for her, he could not be persuaded to call her complaint "nervousness;" when idleness and *ennui* preyed upon a languid frame, he had a startling habit of rousing the patient by a mental cautery. The poor idolized him, but the ladies pronounced him coarse, abrupt, unpleasing; and when ladies decide against a doctor, fate frowns upon him.

How was he to get on in the world? Twenty years before he had thought less of getting on than of the interests of science, or of doing good; now those ideas were gradually leaving him—life had become a stern hand-to-hand fight with hard necessity. The poor seemed to be growing poorer—the difficulty of getting a fee became greater—the ladies seemed more and more determined to show their dislike and aversion.

Matters were growing desperate, thought Dr. Letsom on this autumn night, as he stood watching the chrysanthemums and the fading light in the western sky. Money was becoming a rare commodity with him. His housekeeper, Mrs. Galbraith, had long been evincing signs of great discontent. She had not enough for her requirements—she wanted money for a hundred different things, and the doctor had none to give her. The curtains were worn and shabby, the carpets full of holes, the furniture, though clean and well preserved, was totally insufficient. In vain the doctor assured her he had not the means; after the fashion of weak-minded women, she grumbled incessantly. On this night he felt overwhelmed with cares. The rent due the preceding June had not been paid; the gas and coal accounts were still unsettled; the butcher had sent in his "little bill;" the baker had looked anything but pleased at the non-payment of his. The doctor sadly wanted a new hat—and he had hardly money in hand for the week's expenses. What was to be done?

Mrs. Galbraith had retired to rest in a very aggrieved state of mind, and the doctor stood watching the stars, as they came out one by one in the darkening sky. He was almost tired of the struggle; life had not been a grand success with him; he had worked hard, yet nothing had seemed to prosper. In his early youth he had loved a bright, pretty girl, who had looked forward to becoming his wife; but he had never married, simply because he had not had the means, and the pretty girl had died a sad, disappointed woman. Now, as he watched the stars, he fancied them shining on her grave; he fancied the grass waving above her head, so long and cool, studded with large white

daisies; and he wished that he were lying by her side, free from care, and at rest. Strong man as he was his eyes grew dim with tears, and his lips trembled with a deep-drawn, bitter sob.

He was turning away, with a feeling of contempt for his own weakness, when he was startled by the sound of a vehicle driven furiously down Castle street. What vehicle could it be at that hour of the night—nearly eleven? Stephen Letsom stood still and watched. He saw a traveling carriage, with two horses, driven rapidly up to the door of the principal hotel—the Castle Arms—and there stand for some few minutes. It was too dark for him to see if any one alighted from it, or what took place; but, after a time the horses' heads were turned, and then, like a roll of thunder, came the noise of the carriage-wheels.

The vehicle drew up before his door, and the doctor stood for a few moments as though paralyzed. Then came a violent peal of the door-bell; and he knowing that Mrs. Galbraith had retired for the evening, went to answer it. There indeed, in the starlight, were the handsome traveling carriage, the pair of gray horses, and the postilion. Stephen Letsom looked about him like one in a dream. He had been twenty years in the place, yet no carriage had ever stopped at his door.

He heard a quick, impatient voice, saying:

"Are you the doctor—Dr. Letsom?"

Looking in the direction of the sound, the doctor saw a tall, distinguished-looking man, wrapped in a traveling cloak—a man whose face and manner indicated at once that he belonged to the upper ranks of society. Dr. Stephen Letsom was quick to recognize that fact.

"I am the doctor," he replied, quietly.

"Then for Heaven's sake, help me! I am almost mad. My wife has been suddenly taken ill, and I have been to the hotel, where they tell me they have not a room in which they can lodge her. The thing is incredible. You must help me."

"I will do what I can," returned the doctor.

Had fortune indeed knocked at his door at last?

He went to the carriage-door, and, looking inside, saw a lady, young and beautiful, who stretched out her hands to him, as though appealing for help.

"I am very ill," she moaned, feebly.

Dr. Letsom guessed so much from her pallid face and shadowed eyes.

"What is the matter with your wife?" he asked of the strange gentleman, who bent down and whispered something that made Dr. Letsom himself look anxious.

"Now doctor," said the traveler, "it is useless to raise objections. You see how the matter stands; my wife must stop here. The hotel is full of visitors—people who are here for the

races. There is nowhere else for her to go—she must stay here."

"At my house?" interrogated the doctor. "It is impossible."

"Why?" asked the stranger, quickly.

"Because I am not married—I have no wife, no sister."

"But you have women-servants, surely?" was the hasty rejoinder.

"Only one, and she is not over-clever."

"You can get more. My wife must have help. Send all over the place—get the best nurses, the best help possible. Do not study expense. I will make you a rich man for life if you will only help me now."

"I will help you," said Dr. Letsom.

For a moment his thoughts flew to the green grave under the stars. Riches would come too late, after all; they could not bring back life to the dead.

"Wait one moment," said the doctor; and he hastened to rouse his housekeeper, who, curious and interested, exerted herself so as to satisfy even the stranger.

Then the strange lady, all white and trembling, was helped down from the parlor into the doctor's shabby little parlor.

"Am I going to die?" she asked, raising her large blue eyes to the doctor's face.

"Certainly not," he replied, promptly; "you must not think of dying."

"But I am very ill; and last night I dreamed that I was dead."

"Have you any brandy in the house?" asked the traveler. "See how my wife trembles."

Alas for the poor doctor! There was neither brandy nor wine. With an impatient murmur, the stranger called the postilion and sent him to the Castle arms with such an order as made Mrs. Galbraith open her eyes in wonder. Then, without seeming to notice the doctor or his servant, he flung himself on his knees by the lady's side, and kissed the beautiful white face and colorless lips.

"My darling," he cried, "this is my fault. I ought not to have asked you to undertake such a journey. Can you ever forgive me?"

She kissed him.

"You did all for the best, Hubert," she said, then adding, in a whisper: "Do you think I shall die?"

Then the doctor thought it right to interpose.

"There is no question of death," he said; "but you must be quiet. You must have no agitation—that would injure you."

Then he and Mrs. Galbraith led the beautiful, trembling girl

to the room which the latter had hastily prepared for her, and, when she was installed therein, the doctor returned to the stranger, who was pacing, with quick, impatient steps, up and down the little parlor.

"How is she?" he cried, eagerly.

The doctor shook his head.

"She is young and very nervous," he replied. "I had better tell you at once that she will not be able to leave Castledene for a time—all thought of continuing the journey must be abandoned."

"But she is in no danger?" cried the traveler, and Stephen Letsom saw an agony of suspense in his face.

"No, she is not in danger; but she requires and must have both rest and care."

"She shall have anything, if Heaven will only spare her. Doctor, my best and safest plan will be to make a friend of you, to confide in you, and then we can arrange together what had better be done. Can you spare me five minutes?"

Stephen Letsom nodded assent, and sat down to listen to as strange a story as he had ever heard.

"I should imagine," said the strange gentleman, "that no man likes to plead guilty to a folly. I must do so. Let me first of all introduce myself to you as Lord Charlewood. I am the only son of the Earl of Mountdean, and my father lies dying in Italy. I came of age only last year, and at the same time I fell in love. Now I am not in any way dependent on my father—the title and estate are entailed—but I love him. In these degenerate days it seems perhaps strange to hear a son say that he loves his father. I have obeyed him all my life from this motive. I would give my life for him. But in one respect I have done that which will cause him great annoyance and anger. I have married without his knowledge."

The doctor looked up with greater interest; perhaps his thoughts reverted to the grave in the starlight. Lord Charlewood moved uneasily in his chair.

"I cannot say that I am sorry," he continued, "for I love my wife very dearly; but I do wish now that I had been less hurried, less precipitate. My wife's great loveliness must be my excuse. She is the daughter of a poor curate, the Reverend Charles Trevor, who came two years ago to supply temporarily the place of the Rector of Lynton. He brought his daughter with him; and the first moment I saw her I fell in love with her. My heart seemed to go out from me and cleave to her. I loved her with what I can see now was the selfish ardor of a young man. I had but one thought—to win her. I wrote to my father, who was in Italy, and asked his consent. He refused

it in the most decided manner, and told me to think no more of what after all was but a boy's fancy. He was then staying near the Lake of Como—staying for the benefit of his health—and I went over to see him. I pleaded, prayed, urged my great love—all in vain. The earl, my father, only laughed at me, and said all young men suffered from the fever called love. I came back to England, and found that Mr. Trevor was dead. Madaline, his daughter, was left alone in the world. She raised her beautiful face to mine, poor child, and tried to smile while she talked of going out into the world and of working hard for her daily bread; and, as I listened, my love seemed to grow stronger and deeper. I caught her in my arms, and swore that nothing should part us—that, come what would, she must be my wife. She was very unwilling—not that she did not love me, but because she was afraid of making my father angry; that was her great objection. She knew my love for him and his affection for me. She would not come between us. It was in vain that I prayed her to do as I wished. After a time she consented to a compromise—to marry me without my father's knowledge. It was a folly, I own; now I see clearly its imprudence—then I imagined it the safest and surest way. I persuaded her, as I had persuaded myself, that, when my father once knew that we were married, he would forgive us, and all would go well. We were married eleven months since, and I have been so happy since then that it has seemed to me but a single day. My beautiful young wife was frightened at the bold step we had taken, but I soothed her. I did not take her home to Wood Lynton, but, laying aside all the trappings of wealth and title, we have traveled from place to place as Mr. and Mrs. Charlewood, enjoying our long honeymoon. If we liked any one particular spot we remained in it. But a letter from Italy came like a thunderbolt—my father had grown rapidly worse and wanted to see me at once. If I had been content to go at once, all would have been well. I could not endure that he should die without seeing, loving, and blessing my wife Madaline. I told her my desire, and she consented most cheerfully to accompany me. I ought to have known that—in her state of health—traveling was most injurious; but I was neglectful of the fact—I listened only to my heart's desire, that my father should see my wife before he died. We started on our fatal journey—only this morning. At first my wife seemed to enjoy it; and then I saw all the color fading from her sweet face. I saw her lips grow white and tremble, and I became alarmed. It was not until we reached Castledene that she gave in and told me she could go no further. Still you say there is no danger, and that you do not think she will die?"

"Danger? No, I see none. Life and death lie in the hands of

One above us; but, humanely speaking, I see no fear of danger."

"Of course we cannot get on now," observed Lord Charlewood, "at least Lady Charlewood cannot. How long do you think my suspense will last?"

"Not much longer," was the calm reply. "By noon to-morrow all will be safe and well, I hope."

"I must wait until then," said Lord Charlewood. "I could not leave my wife while even the faintest shadow of danger lies over her. If all be well, I can start the day after to-morrow; and, please Heaven, I shall be in time to see my father. You think I shall have good news for him?"

"I have every hope that you will be able to tell him that the heir of the Mountdeans is thriving and well."

Lord Charlewood smiled.

"Such news as that will more than reconcile him to our marriage," he said. After a pause he continued: "It is a most unfortunate matter; yet I am just as well pleased that my son and heir should be born in England. Doctor, there is another thing I wish to say. I know perfectly well what these little country towns are—everything is a source of gossip and sensation. If it were known that such an incident as this had happened to me, the papers would be filled with it; and it might fall out that my father, the earl, would come to know of it before I myself could tell him. We had better take all proper precautions against such a thing. I should prefer that we be known here only as Mr. and Mrs. Charlewood. No one will think of connecting the surname with the title."

"You are quite right," agreed the doctor.

"Another thing I wish to add is that I want you to spare no expense—send for the best nurse, the best help it is possible to get. Remember that I am a rich man, and that I would give my whole fortune, my life itself a thousand times over to save or to serve my wife."

Then came a summons for the doctor from the room above, and Lord Charlewood was once more left alone. He was a young man, and was certainly both a good and honorable one. He had never deliberately done anything wicked—on the contrary, he had tried always to do what was best; yet, as he stood there, a strange sense of something wanting came over him. The young wife he loved with such passionate worship was in the hour of need, and he could render no assistance.

Later on a strange hush had fallen over the doctor's house. It was past one in the morning; the sky was overcast; the wind was moaning fitfully, as though a storm was brewing in the autumn air. The dew lay thick and heavy on the ground. Inside the house was the strange hush that dangerous sickness

always brings with it. The doctor had in haste summoned the best nurse in Castledene, Hannah Furney, who shook her head gravely when she saw the beautiful pale face. An hour passed, and once more Dr. Letsom sought his distinguished guest.

"I am sorry not to bring better news," he said. "Lady—Mrs. Charlewood—is not so well as I had hoped she would be. Dr. Evans is considered very clever. I should like further advice. Shall I send for him?"

The sudden flash of agony that came into Lord Charlewood's face was a revelation to Dr. Letsom; he laid his hand with a gentle touch on the stranger's arm.

"Do not fear the worst," he said. "She is in the hands of Heaven. I am taking only ordinary precautions. I do not say she is in danger –I merely say that she is not so well as I should like to see her."

Another hour passed, the church clock at Castledene was striking two, and Dr. Evans had joined the grave-faced group around the sick woman's bed. He, too, had looked with unutterable compassion on the beautiful young face—he, too, had bent forward to listen to the whisper that parted the white lips.

"Am I going to die?" she asked.

He tried to smile and say something about hope; but Nurse Furney knew, and she turned away lest the sick woman's questioning eyes should read what her face betrayed.

Three o'clock struck. A sweet voice, abrupt and clear, broke the silence of the solemn scene.

"Hubert! Where is Hubert? I must see him."

"Tell him to come," said Dr. Evans to Dr. Letsom, "but do not tell him there is any danger."

A few minutes later Lord Charlewood stood by the side of his young wife.

"Hubert," she said to him, with outstretched hands, "Hubert, my husband, I am so frightened. They do not tell me the truth. Am I going to die?"

He bent down to kiss her.

"Die, my darling? No, certainly not. You are going to live, to be what you always have been, the dearest, sweetest wife in the whole world."

And he believed implicitly what he said.

Then came a strange sleep, half waking, half dreaming. Lady Charlewood fancied that she was with her husband on the seashore, and that the waves were coming in so fast that they threatened to drown her, they were advancing in such great sheets of foam. Once more she clung to him, crying:

"Help me, Hubert; I shall be drowned—see how the tide is coming in!"

Then the doctor bade him leave her—he must go down to the

shabby, lowly little room, where the gas was burning, and the early dawn of the morning was coming in. The agony of unrest was on him. He thought how useless was money, after all; here he was with thousands at his command, yet he could not purchase help or safety for her whom his soul loved best. He was helpless, he could do nothing to assist her; he could trust only to Heaven.

He went from the window to the door; he trembled at the solemn silence, the terrible hush; he longed for the full light of day. Suddenly he heard a sound that stirred the very depths of his heart—that brought a crimson flush to his face and tears to his eyes. It was the faint cry of a little child. Presently he heard the footsteps of Dr. Letsom; and the next minute the doctor was standing before him, with a grave look on his face.

"You have a little daughter," he said—"a beautiful little girl—but your wife is in danger; you had better come and see her."

Even he—the doctor—accustomed to scenes of sorrow and desolation, was startled by the cry of pain that came from the young man's lips.

CHAPTER II.

Five o'clock! The chimes had played the hour, the church clock had struck; the laborers were going to the fields, the dairy-maids were beginning their work; the sky had grown clear and blue, the long night of agony was over. The Angel of Death had spread his wings over the doctor's house, and awaited only the moment when his sword should fall.

Inside, the scene had hardly changed. The light of the lamp seemed to have grown so ghostly that the nurse had turned it out, and, drawing the blinds, let the faint morning light come in. It fell on the beautiful face that had grown even whiter in the presence of death. Lady Charlewood was dying; yet the feeble arms held the little child tightly. She looked up as her husband entered the room. He had combated by a strong effort all outward manifestations of despair.

"Hubert," whispered the sweet, faint voice, "see, this is our little daughter."

He bent down, but he could not see the child for the tears that filled his eyes.

"Our little daughter," she repeated; "and they say, Hubert, that I have given my life for hers. Is it true?"

He looked at the two doctors; he looked at the white face bearing the solemn, serene impress of death. It would be cruel

to deceive her now, when the hands that caressed the little child were already growing colder.

"Is it true, Hubert?" she repeated, a clear light shining in her dying eyes.

"Yes, my darling, it is true," he said, in a low voice.

"I am dying—really dying—when I have my baby and you?" she questioned. "Oh, Hubert, is it really true?"

Nothing but his sobs answered her; dying as she was, all sweet, womanly compassion awoke in her heart.

"Hubert," she whispered—"oh, my darling, if you could come with me!—I want to see you kiss the baby while it lies here in my arms."

He bent down and kissed the tiny face, she watching him all the time.

"You will be very kind to her, darling, for my sake, because you have loved me so much, and call her by my name—Madaline. Tell her about me when she grows up—how young I was to die, how dearly I loved you, and how I held her in my arms. You will not forget?"

"No," he said, gently; "I shall not forget."

The hapless young mother kissed the tiny rosebud face, all the passion and anguish of her love shining in her dying eyes; and then the nurse carried the babe away.

"Hubert," said Lady Charlewood, in a low, soft whisper, "may I die in your arms, darling?"

She laid her head on his breast, and looked at him with the sweet content of a little child.

"I am so young," she said, gently, "to die—to leave you, Hubert. I have been so happy with you—I love you so much."

"Oh, my wife, my wife!" he groaned, "how am I to bear it?"

The white hands softly clasped his own.

"You will bear it in time," she said. "I know how you will miss me; but you have the baby and your father—you will find enough to fill your life. But you will always love me best—I know that, Hubert. My heart feels so strange; it seems to stop, and then to beat slowly. Lay your face on mine, darling."

He did just as she requested, whispering sweet, solemn words of comfort; and then, beneath his own he felt her lips grow cold and still. Presently he heard one long, deep-drawn sigh. Some one raised the sweet head from his breast, and laid it back upon the pillow. He knew she was dead.

He tried to bear it; he said to himself that he must be a man, that he had to live for his child's sake. He tried to rise, but the strength of his manhood failed him. With a cry never forgotten by those who heard it, Lord Charlewood fell with his face on the ground.

Seven o'clock. The full light of day was shining in the sol-

emn chamber; the faint golden sunbeams touched the beautiful white face, so still and solemn in death; the white hands were folded, and lay motionless on the quiet heart. Kindly hands had brushed back the golden-brown hair; some one had gathered purple chrysanthemums and laid them round the dead woman, so that she looked like a marble bride on a bed of flowers. Death wore no stern aspect there; the agony and the torture, the dread and fear, were all forgotten; there was nothing but the sweet smile of one at perfect rest.

They had not darkened the room, after the usual ghostly fashion—Stephen Letsom would not have it so—but they had let in the fresh air and the sunshine, and had placed autumn flowers in the vases. The baby had been carried away—the kind-hearted nurse had charge of it. Dr. Evans had gone home, haunted by the memory of the beautiful dead face. The birds were singing in the morning sun; and Lord Charlewood, still crushed by his great grief, lay on the couch in the little sitting-room where he had spent so weary a night.

"I cannot believe it," he said, "or, believing, cannot realize it. Do you mean to tell me, doctor, that she who only yesterday sat smiling by my side, life of my life, soul of my soul, dearer to me than all the world, has gone from me, and that I shall see her no more? I cannot, I will not believe it! I shall hear her crying for me directly, or she will come smiling into the room. Oh, Madaline, my wife, my wife!"

Stephen Letsom was too clever a man and too wise a doctor to make any endeavor to stem such a torrent of grief. He knew that it must have its way. He sat patiently listening, speaking when he thought a word would be useful; and Lord Charlewood never knew how much he owed to his kind, unwearied patience.

Presently he went up to look at his wife, and, kneeling by her side, nature's great comforter came to him. He wept as though his heart would break—tears that eased the burning brain, and lightened the heavy heart. Dr. Letsom was a skillful, kindly man; he let the tears flow, and made no effort to stop them. Then, after a time, disguised in a glass of wine, he administered a sleeping potion, which soon took effect. He looked with infinite pity on the tired face. What a storm, a tempest of grief had this man passed through!

"It will be kinder and better to let him sleep the day and night through, if he can," said Stephen to himself. "He would be too ill to attend to any business even if he were awake."

So through the silent hours of the day Lord Charlewood slept, and the story spread from house to house, until the little town rang with it—the story of the travelers, the young husband and wife, who, finding no room at the hotel, had gone to the doc-

tor's, where the poor lady had died. Deep sympathy and pity were felt and expressed; kind-hearted mothers wept over the babe; some few were allowed to enter the solemn death chamber; and these went away haunted, as Dr. Evans was, by the memory of the lovely dead face. Through it all Lord Charlewood slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion and fatigue, and it was the greatest mercy that could have befallen him.

The hour of wakening was to come—Stephen Letsom never forgot it. The bereaved man was frantic in his grief, mad with the sense of his loss. Then the doctor, knowing how one great sorrow counteracts another, spoke of his father, reminding him that if he wished to see him alive he must take some little care of himself.

"I shall not leave her!" cried Lord Charlewood. "Living or dead, she is dearer than all the world to me—I shall not leave her!"

"Nor do I wish you to do so," said the doctor. "I know you are a strong man—I believe you to be a brave one; in grief of this kind the first great thing is to regain self-control. Try to regain yours, and then you will see for yourself what had better be done."

Lord Charlewood discerned the truth.

"Have patience with me," he said, "a little longer; the blow is so sudden, so terrible, I cannot yet realize what the world is without Madaline."

A few hours passed, and the self-control he had struggled for was his. He sent for Dr. Letsom.

"I have been thinking over what is best," he said, "and have decided on all my plans. Have you leisure to discuss them with me?"

The question seemed almost ironical to the doctor, who had so much more time to spare than he cared to have. He sat down by Lord Charlewood's side, and they held together the conversation that led to such strange results.

"I should not like a cold, stone grave for my beautiful wife," said Lord Charlewood. "She was so fair, so *spirituelle*, she loved all nature so dearly; she loved the flowers, trees, and the free fresh air of heaven. Let her be where she can have them all now."

The doctor looked up with mild reproach in his eyes.

"She has something far better than the flowers of this world," he said. "If ever a dead face told of rest and peace, hers does; I have never seen such a smile on any other."

"I should like to find her a grave where the sun shines and the dew falls," observed Lord Charlewood—"where grass and flowers grow and birds sing in the trees overhead. She would not seem so far away from me then."

"You can find many such graves in the pretty church-yard here in Castledene," said the doctor.

"In time to come," continued Lord Charlewood, "she shall have the grandest marble monument that can be raised, but now a plain white cross will be sufficient, with her name, Madaline Charlewood; and, doctor, while I am away you will have her grave attended to—kept bright with flowers—tended as for some one that you loved."

Then they went out together to the green church-yard at the foot of the hill, so quiet, so peaceful, so calm, and serene, that death seemed robbed of half its terrors; white daisies and golden buttercups studded it, the dense foliage of tall lime-trees rippled above it. The graves were covered with richly-hued autumn flowers; all was sweet, calm, restful. There was none of earth's fever here. The tall gray spire of the church rose toward the clear blue sky.

Lord Charlewood stood looking around him in silence.

"I have seen such a scene in pictures," he said. "I have read of such in poems, but it is the first I have really beheld. If my darling could have chosen for herself, she would have preferred to rest here."

On the western slope, where the warmest and brightest sunbeams lay, under the shade of the rippling lime-trees, they laid Lady Charlewood to rest. For long years afterward the young husband was to carry with him the memory of that green grassy grave. A plain white cross bore for the present her name; it said simply:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
MADALINE CHARLEWOOD,
who died in her 20th year.
ERECTED BY HER SORROWING HUSBAND.

"When I give her the monument she deserves," he said, "I can add no more."

They speak of that funeral to this day in Castledene—of the sad, tragic story, the fair young mother's death, the husband's wild despair. They tell how the beautiful stranger was buried when the sun shone and the birds sang—how solemnly the church-bell tolled, each knell seeming to cleave the clear sunlit air—how the sorrowing young husband, so suddenly and so terribly bereft, walked first, the chief mourner in the sad procession; they tell how white his face was, and how at each toll of the solemn bell he winced as though some one had struck him a terrible blow—how he tried hard to control himself, but how at the grave, when she was hidden forever from his sight, he stretched out his hands, crying, "Madaline, Madaline!" and

how for the remainder of that day he shut himself up alone, refusing to hear the sound of a voice, to look at a human face—refusing food, comfort, grieving like one who has no hope for the love he had lost. All Castledene grieved with him; it seemed as though death and sorrow had entered every house.

Then came the morrow, when he had to look his life in the face again—life that he found so bitter without Madaline. He began to remember his father, who, lying sick unto death, craved for his presence. He could do no more for Madaline; all his grief, his tears, his bitter sorrow, were useless; he could not bring her back; he was powerless where she was concerned. But with regard to his father matters were different—to him he could take comfort, healing, and consolation. So it was decided that he should at once continue his broken journey.

What of little Madaline, the child who had her dead mother's large blue eyes and golden hair? Again Lord Charlewood and the doctor sat in solemn conclave; this time the fate of the little one hung in the balance.

Lord Charlewood said that if he found his father still weak and ill, he should keep the secret of his marriage. Of course, if Madaline had lived, all would have been different—he would have proudly owned it then. But she was dead. The child was so young and so feeble, it seemed doubtful whether it would live. What need then to grieve the old earl by the story of his folly and his disobedience? Let the secret remain. Stephen Letsom quite agreed with him in this; no one knew better than himself how dangerous was the telling of bad or disagreeable news to a sick man. And then Lord Charlewood added:

"You have indeed been a friend in need to me, Dr. Letsom. Money can no more repay such help as yours than can thanks; all my life I shall be grateful to you. I am going now to Italy, and most probably I shall remain there until the earl, my father, grows better, or the end comes. When I return to England, my first care shall be to forward your views and prospects in life; until then I want you to take charge of my child."

Stephen Letsom looked up, with something like a smile.

"I shall be a rough nurse," he observed.

"You understand me," said Lord Charlewood. "You have lived here so long that you know the place and every one in it. I have been thinking so much of my little one. It would be absurd for me to take her to Italy; and as, for my father's sake, I intend to keep my marriage a secret for some time longer, I cannot send her to any of my own relatives or friends. I think the best plan will be for you to find some healthy, sensible woman, who would be nurse and foster-mother to her."

"That can easily be managed," remarked Stephen Letsom.

"Then you will have both child and nurse entirely under

your own control. You can superintend all arrangements made for the little one's benefit. I have thought of offering to send you five hundred per annum, from which you can pay what you think proper for the child. You can purchase what is needful for her, and you will have an income for yourself. That I beg you accept in return for the services you have rendered me."

Dr. Letsom expressed his gratitude. He thanked Lord Charlewood, and began at once to look around for some one who would be a fitting person to take care of little Madaline. Lord Charlewood had expressed a desire to see all settled before leaving for Italy.

Among the doctor's patients was one who had interested him very much—Margaret Dornham. She had been a lady's-maid. She was a pretty, graceful woman, gentle and intelligent—worthy of a far better lot than had fallen to her share. She ought to have married a well-to-do tradesman, for whom she would have made a most suitable wife; but she had given her love to a handsome ne'er do well, with whom she had never had one moment of peace or happiness. Henry Dornham had never borne a good character; he had a dark, handsome face—a certain kind of rich, gypsy-like beauty—but no other qualifications. He was neither industrious, nor honest, nor sober. His handsome face, his dark eyes, and rich curling hair had won the heart of the pretty, graceful, gentle lady's-maid, and she had married him—only to rue the day and hour in which she had first seen him.

They lived in a picturesque little cottage called Ashwood, and there Margaret Dornham passed through the greatest joy and greatest sorrow of her life. Her little child, the one gleam of sunshine that her darkened life had ever known, was born in the little cottage, and there it had died.

Dr. Letsom, who was too abrupt for the ladies of Castledene, had watched with the greatest and most untiring care over the fragile life of that little child. He had exerted his utmost skill in order to save it. But all was in vain; and on the very day that Lord Charlewood arrived at Castledene the child died.

When a tender nurse and foster-mother was needed for little Madaline, the doctor thought of Margaret Dornham. He felt that all difficulty was at an end. He sent for her. Even Lord Charlewood looked with interest at the graceful, timid woman, whose fair young face was so deeply marked with lines of care.

"Will I take charge of a little child?" she replied to the doctor's question. "Indeed I will, and thank Heaven for sending me something to keep my heart from breaking."

"You feel the loss of your own little one very keenly?" said Lord Charlewood.

"Feel it, sir? All the heart I have lies in my baby's grave."

"You must give a little of it to mine, since Heaven has taken

its own mother," he said, gently. "I am not going to try to bribe you with money—money does not buy the love and care of good women like you—but I ask you, for the love you bore to your own child, to be kind to mine. Try to think, if you can, that it is your own child brought back to you."

"I will," she promised, and she kept her word.

"You will spare neither expense nor trouble," he continued, "and when I return you shall be most richly recompensed. If all goes well, and the little one prospers with you, I shall leave her with you for two or three years at least. You have been a lady's-maid, the doctor tells me. In what families have you lived?"

"Principally with Lady L'Estrange, of Verdun Royal, sir," she replied. "I left because Miss L'Estrange was growing up, and my lady wished to have a French maid."

In after years he thought how strange it was that he should have asked the question.

"I want you," said Lord Charlewood, "to devote yourself entirely to the little one; you will be so liberally paid as not to need work of any other kind. I am going abroad, but I leave Dr. Letsom as the guardian of the child; apply to him for everything you want, as you will not be able to communicate with me."

He watched her as she took the child in her arms. He was satisfied when he saw the light that came into her face; he knew that little Madaline would be well cared for. He placed a bank note for fifty pounds in the woman's hands.

"Buy all that is needful for the little one," he said.

In all things Margaret Dornham promised obedience. One would have thought she had found a great treasure. To her kindly, womanly heart, the fact that she once more held a little child in her arms was a source of the purest happiness. The only drawback was when she reached home, and her husband laughed coarsely at the sad little story.

"You have done a good day's work, Maggie," he said; "now I shall expect you to keep me, and I shall take it easy."

He kept his word, and from that day made no further effort to earn any money.

"Maggie had enough for both," he said—"for both of them and that bit of a child."

Faithful, patient Margaret never complained, and not even Dr. Letsom knew how the suffering of her daily life had increased, even though she was comforted by the love of the little child.

CHAPTER III.

Madaline slept in her grave—her child was safe and happy with the kindly, tender woman who was to supply its mother's place. Then Lord Charlewood prepared to leave the place where he had suffered so bitterly. The secret of his title had been well kept. No one dreamed that the stranger whose visit to the little town had been such a sad one was the son of one of England's earls. Charlewood did not strike any one as being a very uncommon name. There was not the least suspicion as to his real identity. People thought he must be rich; but that he was noble also no one ever imagined.

Mary Galbraith, the doctor's housekeeper, thought a golden shower had fallen over the house. Where there had been absolute poverty there was now abundance. There were no more shabby curtains and threadbare carpets—everything was new and comfortable. The doctor seemed to have grown younger—relieved as he was from a killing weight of anxiety and care.

The day came when Lord Charlewood was to say good-by to his little daughter, and the friends who had been friends indeed. Margaret Dornham was sent for. When she arrived the two gentlemen were in the parlor, and she was shown in to them. Every detail of that interview was impressed on Margaret's mind. The table was strewn with papers, and Lord Charlewood, taking some in his hand, said:

"You should have a safe place for those, doctor. Strange events happen in life. They might possibly be required some day as evidences of identification."

"Not much fear of that," returned the doctor, with a smile. "Still, as you say, it is best to be cautious."

"Here is the first—you may as well keep it with the rest," said Lord Charlewood; "it is a copy of my marriage certificate. Then you have here the certificates of my little daughter's birth and of my poor wife's death. Now we will add to these a signed agreement between you and myself for the sum I have spoken about."

Rapidly enough Lord Charlewood filled up another paper, which was signed by the doctor and himself; then Stephen Letsom gathered them all together. Margaret Dornham saw him take from the sideboard a plain oaken box bound in brass, and lock the papers in it.

"There will be no difficulty about the little lady's identification while this lasts," he said, "and the papers remain undestroyed."

She could not account for the impulse that led her to watch him so closely, while she wondered what the papers could be worth.

Then both gentlemen turned their attention from the box to the child. Lord Charlewood would be leaving directly, and it would be the last time that he, at least, could see the little one. There was all a woman's love in his heart and in his face, as he bent down to kiss it and say farewell.

"In three years' time, when I come back again," he said, "she will be three years old—she will walk and talk. You must teach her to say my name, Mrs. Dornham, and teach her to love me."

Then he bade farewell to the doctor who had been so kind a friend to him, leaving something in his hand which made his heart light for many a long day afterward.

"I am a bad correspondent, Dr. Letsom," he said; "I never write many letters—but you may rely upon hearing from me every six months. I shall send you half-yearly checks—and you may expect me in three years from this at latest; then my little Madaline will be of a manageable age, and I can take her to Wood Lynton."

So they parted, the two who had been so strangely brought together—parted with a sense of liking and trust common among Englishmen who feel more than they express. Lord Charlewood looked round him as he left the town.

"How little I thought," he said, "that I should leave my dead wife and living child here! It was a town so strange to me that I hardly even knew its name."

On arriving at his destination, to his great joy, and somewhat to his surprise, Lord Charlewood found that his father was better; he had been afraid of finding him dead. The old man's joy on seeing his son again was almost pitiful in its excess—he held his hands in his.

"My son—my only son! why did you not come sooner?" he asked. "I have longed so for you. You have brought life and healing with you; I shall live years longer now that I have you again."

And in the first excitement of such happiness Lord Charlewood did not dare to tell his father the mournful story of his marriage and of his young wife's untimely death. Then the doctors told him that the old earl might live for some few years longer, but that he would require the greatest care; he had certainly heart-disease, and any sudden excitement, any great anxiety, any cause of trouble might kill him at once. Knowing this Lord Charlewood did not dare to tell his secret; it would have been plunging his father into danger uselessly; besides which the telling of it was useless now—his beautiful wife was

dead, and the child too young to be recognized or made of consequence. So he devoted himself to the earl, having decided in his own mind what steps to take. If the earl lived until little Madaline reached her third year, then he would tell him his secret; the child would be pretty and graceful—she would, in all probability, win his love. He could not let it go on longer than that. Madaline could not remain unknown and uncared for in that little county town; it was not to be thought of. Therefore, if his father lived, and all went well, he would tell his story then; if, on the contrary, his health failed, then he would keep his secret altogether, and his father would never know that he had disobeyed him.

There was a wonderful affection between this father and son. The earl was the first to notice the change that had come over his bright, handsome boy; the music had all gone from his voice, the ring from his laughter, the light from his face. Presently he observed the deep mourning dress.

"Hubert," he asked, suddenly, "for whom are you in mourning?"

Lord Charlewood's face flushed. For one moment he felt tempted to answer—

"For my beloved wife whom Heaven has taken from me."

But he remembered the probable consequence of such a shock to his father, and replied, quietly:

"For one of my friends, father—one whom you did not know." And Lord Mountdean did not suspect.

Another time the old earl placed his arm round his son's neck.

"How I wish, Hubert," he said, "that your mother had lived to see you a grown man! I think—do not laugh at me, my son—I think yours is perfect manhood; you please me infinitely."

Lord Charlewood smiled at the simple, loving praise.

"I have a woman's pride in your handsome face and tall, stately figure. How glad I am, my son, that no cloud has ever come between us! You have been the best of sons to me. When I die you can say to yourself that you have never once in all your life given me one moment's pain. How pleased I am that you gave up that foolish marriage for my sake! You would not have been happy. Heaven never blesses such marriages."

He little knew that each word was as a dagger to his son's heart.

"After you had left me and had gone back to England," he continued, "I used to wonder if I had done wisely or well in refusing you your heart's desire; now I know that I did well, for unequal marriages never prosper. She, the girl you loved, may have been very beautiful, but you would never have been happy with her."

"Hush, father!" said Lord Charlewood, gently. "We will not speak of this again."

"Does it still pain you? tell me, my son," cried the earl.

"Not in the way you think," he replied.

"I would not pain you for the world—you know that, Hubert. But you must not let that one unfortunate love affair prejudice you against marriage. I should like to see you married, my son. I should like you to love some noble, gentle lady whom I could call daughter; I should like to hold your children in my arms, to hear the music of children's voices before I go."

"Should you love my children so much, father?" he asked.

"Yes, more than I can tell you. You must marry, Hubert; and then, as far as you are concerned, I shall not have a wish left unfulfilled."

There was hope then for his little Madaline—hope that in time she would win the old earl's heart, and prevent his grieving over the unfortunate marriage. For two years and a half the Earl of Mountdean lingered; the fair Italian clime, the warmth, the sunshine, the flowers, all seemed to join in giving him new life. For two years and a half he improved, so that his son had begun to hope that he might return to England, and once more see the home he loved so dearly—Wood Lynton; and, though during this time his secret preyed upon him through every hour of every day, causing him to long to tell his father, yet he controlled the longing, because he would do nothing that might in the least degree retard his recovery. Then, when the two years and a half had passed, and he began to take counsel with himself how he could best break the intelligence, the earl's health suddenly failed him, and he could not accomplish his purpose.

During this time he had every six months sent regular remittances to England, and had received in return most encouraging letters about little Madaline. She was growing strong and beautiful; she was healthy, fair, and happy. She could say his name; she could sing little baby-songs. Once the doctor cut a long golden-brown curl from her little head and sent it to him; but when he received it the earl lay dying, and the son could not show his father his little child's hair. He died as he had lived, loving and trusting his son, clasping his hand to the last, and murmuring sweet and tender words to him. Lord Charlewood's heart smote him as he listened; he had not merited such implicit faith and trust.

"Father," he said, "listen for one moment! Can you hear me? I did marry Madaline—I loved her so dearly, I could not help it—I married her; and she died one year afterward. But she left me a little daughter. Can you hear me, father?"

No gleam of light came into the dying eyes, no consciousness

into the quiet face; the earl did not hear. When, at last, his son had made up his mind to reveal his secret, it was too late for his father to hear—and he died without knowing it. He died, and was brought back to England, and buried with great pomp and magnificence; and then his son reigned in his stead, and became Earl of Mountdean. The first thing that he did after his father's funeral was to go down to Castledene; he had made all arrangements for bringing his daughter and heiress home. He was longing most impatiently to see her; but when he reached the little town a shock of surprise awaited him that almost cost him his life.

CHAPTER IV.

Dr. Letsom had prospered; one gleam of good fortune had brought with it a sudden outburst of sunshine. The doctor had left his little house in Castle street, and had taken a pretty villa just outside Castledene. He had furnished it nicely—white lace curtains were no longer an unattainable luxury; no house in the town looked so clean, so bright, or so pretty as the doctor's. People began to look up to him; it was rumored that he had had money left to him—a fortune that rendered him independent of his practice. No sooner was that quite understood than people began to find out that after all he was a very clever man. No sooner did they feel quite convinced that he was indifferent about his practice than they at once appreciated his services; what had been called abruptness now became truth and sincerity. He was declared to be like Dr. Abernethy—wonderfully clever, though slightly brusque in manner. Patients began to admire him; one or two instances of wonderful cures were quoted in his favor; the world, true to itself, true to its own maxims, began to respect him when it was believed that he had good fortune for his friend. In one year's time he had the best practice in the town, the ladies found his manner so much improved.

He bore his good-fortune as he had borne his ill-fortune, with great equanimity; it had come too late. If but a tithe of it had fallen to his share twelve years earlier, he might have made the woman he loved so dearly his wife. She might have been living—loving, happy, by his side. Nothing could bring her back—the good-fortune had come all too late; still he was grateful for it. It was pleasant to be able to pay his bills when they became due, to be able to help his poorer neighbors, to be able to afford for himself little luxuries such as he had long been without. The greatest happiness he had now in life was his love for little

Madaline. The hold she had taken of him was marvelous; from the first moment she held out her baby-hands until the last in which he saw her she was his one dream of delight. At first he had visited Ashwood as a matter of duty; but, as time passed on those visits became his dearest pleasures. The child began to know him, her lovely little face to brighten for him; she had no fear of him, but would sit on his knee and lisp her pretty stories and sing her pretty songs until he was fairly enchanted.

Madaline was a lovely child. She had a beautiful head and face, and a figure exquisitely molded. Her smiles were like sunshine; her hair had in it threads of gold; her eyes were of the deep blue that one sees in summer. It was not only her great loveliness, but there was about her a wonderful charm, a fascination, that no one could resist.

Dr. Letsom loved the child. She sat on his knee and talked to him, until the whole face of the earth seemed changed to him. Besides his great love for the little Madaline, he became interested in the story of Margaret Dornham's life—in her love for the handsome, reckless ne'er-do-well who had given up work as a failure—in her wonderful patience, for she never complained—in her sublime heroism, for she bore all as a martyr. He heard how Henry Dornham was often seen intoxicated—heard that he was abusive, violent. He went afterward to the cottage, and saw bruises on his wife's delicate arms and hands—dark cruel marks on her face; but by neither word nor look did she ever betray her husband. Watching that silent, heroic life, he became interested in her. More than once he tried to speak to her about her husband—to see if anything could be done to reclaim him. She knew that all efforts were in vain—there was no good in him; still more she knew now that there never had been such good as she had hoped and believed. Another thing pleased and interested the doctor—it was Margaret Dornham's passionate love for her foster child. All the love that she would have lavished on her husband, all the love that she would have given to her own child, all the repressed affection and buried tenderness of heart were given to this little one. It was touching, pitiful, sad, to see how she worshiped her.

"What shall I do when the three years are over, and her father comes to claim her?" she would say to the doctor. "I shall never be able to part with her. Sometimes I think I shall run away with her and hide her."

How little she dreamed that there was a prophecy in the words!

"Her father has the first claim," said Dr. Letsom. "It may be hard for us to lose her, but she belongs to him."

"He will never love her as I do," observed Margaret Dornham.

Of the real rank and position of that father she had not the faintest suspicion. He had money, she knew; but that was all she knew—and money to a woman whose heart hungers for love seems very little.

"There is something almost terrible in the love of that woman for that child," thought the doctor. "She is good, earnest, tender, true, by nature; but she is capable of anything for the little one's sake."

So the two years and a half passed, and the child, with her delicate, marvelous grace, had become the very light of those two lonely lives. In another six months they would have to lose her. Dr. Letsom knew very well that if the earl were still living at the end of the three years his son would tell him of his marriage.

On a bright, sunshiny day in June the doctor walked over to Ashwood. He had a little packet of fruit and cakes with him, and a wonderful doll, dressed most royally.

"Madaline!" he cried, as he entered the cottage, and she came running to him, "should you like a drive with me to-morrow?" he asked. "I am going to Corfell, and I will promise to take you if you will be a good girl."

She promised—for a drive with the doctor was her greatest earthly delight.

"Bring her to my house about three to-morrow afternoon, Mrs. Dornham," said Dr. Letsom, "and she shall have her drive."

Margaret promised. When the time came she took the little one, dressed in her pretty white frock; and as they sat in the drawing-room, the doctor was brought home to his house—dead.

It was such a simple yet terrible accident that had killed him. A poor man had been injured by a kick from a horse. For want of better accommodation, he had been carried up into a loft over a stable, where the doctor attended him. In the loft was an open trap-door, through which trusses of hay and straw were raised and lowered. No one warned Dr. Letsom about it. The aperture was covered with straw, and he, walking quickly across, fell through. There was but one comfort—he did not suffer long. His death was instantaneous; and on the bright June afternoon when he was to have taken little Madaline for a drive, he was carried home, through the sunlit streets, dead.

Margaret Dornham and the little child sat waiting for him when the sad procession stopped at the door.

"The doctor is dead!" was the cry from one to another.

A terrible pain shot through Margaret's head. Dead! The kindly man, who had been her only friend, dead! Then perhaps the child would be taken from her, and she should see it no more!

An impulse, for which she could hardly account, and for which she was hardly responsible, seized her. She must have the box that contained the papers, lest, finding the papers, people should rob her of the child. Quick as thought, she seized the box—which always stood on a bracket in the drawing-room—and hid it under her shawl. To the end of her life she was puzzled as to why she had done this. It would not be missed, she knew, in the confusion that was likely to ensue. She felt sure, also, that no one, save herself and the child's father, knew of its contents.

She did not wait long in that scene of confusion and sorrow. Clasping the child in her arms, lest she should see the dead face, Margaret Dornham hurried back to the cottage, bearing with her the proofs of the child's identity.

The doctor was buried, and with him all trace of the child seemed lost. Careful search was made in his house for any letters that might concern her, that might give her father's address; but Stephen Letsom had been faithful to his promise—he had kept the secret. There was nothing that could give the least clew. There were no letters, no memoranda; and, after a time, people came to the conclusion that it would be better to let the child remain where she was, for her father would be sure in time to hear of the doctor's death and to claim her.

So September came, with its glory of autumn leaves. Just three years had elapsed since Lady Charlewood had died; and then the great trouble of her life came to Margaret Dornham.

CHAPTER V.

On the day after Dr. Letsom's death, Margaret Dornham's husband was apprehended on a charge of poaching and aiding in a dangerous assault on Lord Turton's gamekeepers. Bail was refused for him, but at the trial he was acquitted for want of evidence. Every one knew he was guilty. He made no great effort to conceal it. But he defied the whole legal power of England to prove him guilty. He employed clever counsel, and the result was his acquittal. He was free; but the prison brand was on him, and his wife felt that she could not endure the disgrace.

"I shall go from bad to worse now, Maggie," he said to her. "I do not find prison so bad, nor yet difficult to bear; if ever I see by any lucky hit I can make myself a rich man, I shall not mind a few years in jail as the price. A forgery, or something of that kind, or the robbery of a well-stocked bank, will be henceforward my highest aim in life."

She placed her hand on his lips and prayed him for Heaven's sake to be silent. He only laughed.

"Nature never intended me to work—she did not indeed, Maggie. My fellow-men must keep me; they keep others far less deserving."

From that moment she knew no peace or rest. He would keep his word; he would look upon crime as a source of profit; he would watch his opportunity of wrong-doing, and seize it when it came.

In the anguish of her heart she cried aloud that it must not be at Ashwood; anywhere else, in any other spot, but not there, where she had been known in the pride of her fair young life—not there, where people had warned her not to marry the handsome, reckless, ne'er-do-well, and had prophesied such terrible evil for her if she did marry him—not there, where earth was so fair, where all nature told of innocence and purity. If he must sin, let it be far away in large cities where the ways of men were evil.

She decided on leaving Ashwood. Another and perhaps even stronger motive that influenced her was her passionate love for the child; that was her one hope in life, her one sheet-anchor, the one thing that preserved her from the utter madness of desolation.

The three years had almost elapsed; the doctor was dead, and had left nothing behind him that could give any clew to Madaline's identity, and in a short time—she trembled to think how short—the father would come to claim his child, and she would lose her. When she thought of that, Margaret Dornham clung to the little one in a passion of despair. She would go away and take Madaline with her—keep her where she could love her—where she could bring her up as her own child, and lavish all the warmth and devotion of her nature upon her. She never once thought that in acting thus she was doing a selfish, a cruel deed—that she was taking the child from her father, who of all people living had the greatest claim upon her.

"He may have more money than I have," thought poor, mistaken Margaret, "but he cannot love her so much; and after all love is better than money."

It was easy to manage her husband. She had said but little to him at the time she undertook the charge of little Madaline, and he had been too indifferent to make inquiries. She told him now, what was in some measure quite true, that with the doctor's death her income had ceased, and that she herself not only was perfectly ignorant of the child's real name, but did not even know to whom to write. It was true, but she knew at the same time that, if she would only open the box of papers, she would not be ignorant of any one point; for those papers

she had firmly resolved never to touch, so that in saying she knew nothing of the child's identity she would be speaking the bare truth.

At first Henry Dornham was indignant. The child should not be left a burden and drag on his hands, he declared—it must go to the work-house.

But patient Margaret clasped her arms round his neck, and whispered to him that the child was so clever, so pretty, she would be a gold-mine to them in the future—only let them get away from Ashwood, and go to London, where she could be well trained and taught. He laughed a sneering laugh, for which, had he been any other than her husband, she would have hated him.

"Not a bad plan, Maggie," he said; "then she can work to keep us. I, myself, do not care where we go or what we do, so that no one asks me to work."

He was easily persuaded to say nothing about their removal, to go to London without saying anything to his old friends and neighbors of their intentions. Margaret knew well that so many were interested in the child that she would not be allowed to take her away if her wish became known.

How long the little cottage at Ashwood had been empty no one knows. It stood so entirely alone that for weeks together nothing was seen or known of its inhabitants. Henry Dornham was missed from his haunts. His friends and comrades wondered for a few days, and then forgot him; they thought that in all probability he was engaged in some not very reputable pursuit.

The rector of Castledene—the Rev. John Darnley—was the first really to miss them. He had always been interested in little Madaline. When he heard from the shop keepers that Margaret had not been seen in the town lately, he feared she was ill, and resolved to go and see her. His astonishment was great when he found the cottage closed and the Dornhams gone—the place had evidently been empty for some weeks. On inquiry he found that the time of their departure and the place of their destination was equally unknown. No one knew whither they had gone or anything about them. Mr. Darnley was puzzled; it seemed to him very strange that, after having lived in the place so long, Margaret Dornham should have left without saying one word to any human being.

"There is a mystery in it," thought the rector. He never dreamed that the cause of the mystery was the woman's passionate love for the child.

All Castledene wondered with him—indeed, for some days the little town was all excitement. Margaret Dornham had disappeared with the child who had been left in their midst. Every

one seemed to be more or less responsible for her; but neither wonder nor anything else gave them the least clew as to whither or why she had gone. After a few day's earnest discussion and inquiry the excitement died away, when a wonderful event revived it. It was no other than the arrival of the new Earl of Mountdean in search of his little girl.

This time the visitor did not take any pains to conceal his title. He drove to the "Castle Arms," and from there went at once to the doctor's house. He found it closed and empty. The first person he asked told him that the doctor had been for some weeks dead and buried.

The young earl was terribly shocked. Dead and buried—the kindly man who had befriended him in the hour of need! It seemed almost incredible. And why had no one written to him? Still he remembered the address of his child's foster-mother. It was Ashwood Cottage; and he went thither at once. When he found that too closed and deserted, it seemed to him that fortune was playing him a trick.

He was disconcerted; and then, believing that this at least was but a case of removal, he decided upon going to the rector of the parish, whom he well remembered. He surely would be able to give him all information.

Mr. Darnley looked up in wonder at the announcement of his visitor's name—the Earl of Mountdean. What could the earl possibly want of him?

His wonder deepened as he recognized in the earl the stranger at the burial of whose fair young wife he had assisted three years before. The earl held out his hand.

"You are surprised to see me, Dr. Darnley? You recognize me, I perceive."

The rector contrived to say something about his surprise, but Lord Mountdean interrupted him hastily:

"Yes, I understand. I was traveling as Mr. Charlewood when my terrible misfortune overtook me here. I have returned from Italy, where I have been spending the last three years. My father has just died, and I am here in search of my child. My child," continued the earl, seeing the rector's blank face—"where is she? I find my poor friend the doctor is dead, and the house where my little one's foster-mother lived is empty. Can you tell me what it means?"

He tried to speak calmly, but his handsome face had grown quite white, his lips were dry and hot, his voice, even to himself, had a strange, harsh sound.

"Where is she?" he repeated. "The little one—my Madaline's child? I have a strange feeling that all is not well. Where is my child?"

He saw the shadow deepen on the rector's face, and he clasped his arm.

"Where is she?" he cried. "You cannot mean that she is dead? Not dead, surely? I have not seen her since I left her, a little, feeble baby; but she has lived in my heart through all these weary years of exile. My whole soul has hungered and thirsted for her. By night and by day I have dreamed of her, always with Madaline's face. She has spoken sweet words to me in my dreams, always in Madaline's voice. I must see her. I cannot bear this suspense. You do not answer me. Can it be that she too is dead?"

"No, she is not dead," replied the rector. "I saw her two months since, and she was then living—well, beautiful, and happy. No, the little one is not dead."

"Then tell me, for pity's sake, where she is!" cried the earl, in an agony of impatience.

"I cannot. Two months since I was at Ashwood Cottage. Margaret Dornham's worthless husband was in some great trouble. I went to console his wife; and then I saw the little one. I held her in my arms, and thought, as I looked at her, that I had never seen such a lovely face. Then I saw no more of her; and my wonder was aroused on hearing some of the tradespeople say that Mrs. Dornham had not been in town for some weeks. I believed she was ill, and went to see. My wonder was as great as your own at finding the house closed. Husband, wife, and child had disappeared as though by magic from the place, leaving no clew or trace behind them."

The rector was almost alarmed at the effect of his words. The young earl fell back in his chair, looking as though the shadow of death had fallen over him.

CHAPTER VI.

It was but a child, the rector thought to himself, whom its father had seen but a few times. He did not understand that to Lord Mountdean this child—his dying wife's legacy—was the one object in life, that she was all that remained to him of a love that had been dearer than life itself. Commonplace words of comfort rose to his lips, but the earl did not even hear them. He looked up suddenly, with a ghastly pallor still on his face.

"How foolish I am to alarm myself so greatly!" he said. "Some one or other will be sure to know whither the woman has gone. She may have had some monetary trouble, and so have desired to keep her whereabouts a secret; but some one or other will know. If she is in the world I will find her. How

foolish I am to be so terribly frightened! If the child is living what have I to fear?"

But, though his words were brave and courageous, his hands trembled, and the rector saw signs of great agitation. He rang for wine, but Lord Mountdean could not take it—he could do nothing until he had found his child.

In few words he told the rector the story of his marriage.

"I thought," he said, "that I could not do better for the little one than leave her here in the doctor's care."

"You were right," returned the rector; "the poor doctor's love for the child was talked about everywhere. As for Margaret Dornham, I do not think, if she had been her own, she could have loved her better. Whatever else may have gone wrong, take my word for it, there was no lack of love for the child; she could not have been better cared for—of that I am quite sure."

"I am glad to hear you say so; that is some comfort. But why did no one write to me when the doctor died?"

"I do not think he left one shred of paper containing any allusion to your lordship. All his effects were claimed by some distant cousin, who now lives in his house. I was asked to look over his papers, but there was not a private memorandum among them—not one; there was nothing in fact but receipted bills."

Lord Mountdean looked up.

"There must be some mistake," he observed. "I myself placed in his charge all the papers necessary for the identification of my little daughter."

"May I ask of what they consisted?" said the rector.

"Certainly—the certificate of my marriage, of my beloved wife's death, of my little daughter's birth, and an agreement between the doctor and myself as to the sum that was to be paid to him yearly while he had charge of my child."

"Then the doctor knew your name, title, and address?"

"Yes; I had no motive in keeping them secret, save that I did not wish my marriage to be known to my father until I myself could tell him—and I know how fast such news travels. I remember distinctly where he placed the papers. I watched him."

"Where was it?" asked Mr. Darnley. "For I certainly have seen nothing of them."

"In a small oaken box with brass clasps, which stood on a sideboard. I remember it as though it were yesterday."

"I have seen no such box," said the rector. "Our wisest plan will be to go at once to the house where his cousin, Mr. Grey, resides, and see if the article is in his possession. I am quite sure, though, that he would have mentioned it if he had seen it."

Without a minute's delay they drove at once to the house, and found Mr. Grey at home. He was surprised when he heard the name and rank of his visitor, and above all when he understood his errand.

"A small oaken box with brass clasps?" he said. "No; I have nothing of the kind in my possession; but, if your lordship will wait, I will have a search made at once."

Every drawer, desk, and recess were examined in vain. There was no trace of either the box or the papers.

"I have an inventory of everything the doctor's house contained—it was taken the day after his death," said Mr. Grey; "we can look through that."

Item after item was most carefully perused. The list contained no mention of a small oaken box. It was quite plain that box and papers had both disappeared.

"Could the doctor have given them into Mrs. Dornham's charge?" asked the earl.

"No," replied the rector—"I should say certainly not. I am quite sure that Mrs. Dornham did not even know the child's surname. I remember once asking her about it; she said it was a long name, and that she could never remember it. If she had had the papers, she would have read them. I cannot think she holds them."

Then they went to visit Mrs. Galbraith, the doctor's housekeeper. She had a distinct recollection of the box—it used to stand on the sideboard, and a large-sized family Bible generally lay on the top of it. How long it had been out of sight when the doctor died she did not know, but she had never seen it since. Then they drove to the bank, thinking that, perhaps, for greater security, he might have deposited it there. No such thing had been heard of. Plainly enough, the papers had disappeared; both the earl and the rector were puzzled.

"They can be of no possible use to any one but myself," said Lord Mountdean. "Now that my poor father is dead and cannot be distressed about it, I shall tell the whole world—if it cares to listen—the story of my marriage. If I had wanted to keep that or the birth of my child a secret, I could have understood the papers being stolen by one wishing to trade with them. As it is, I cannot see that they are of the least use to any one except myself."

They gave up the search at last, and then Lord Mountdean devoted himself to the object—the finding of his child.

In a few days the story of his marriage was told by every newspaper in the land; also the history of the strange disappearance of his child. Large rewards were offered to any one who could bring the least information. Not content with em-

ploying the best detective skill in England, he conducted the search himself. He worked unwearyingly.

"A man, woman, and child could not possibly disappear from the face of the earth without leaving some trace behind," he would say.

One little gleam of light came, which filled him with hope—they found that Margaret Dornham had sold all her furniture to a broker living at a town called Wrentford. She had sent for him herself, and had asked him to purchase it, saying that she, with her husband, was going to live at a distance, and that they did not care about taking it with them. He remembered having asked her where she was going, but she evaded any reply. He could tell no more. He showed what he had left of the furniture; and tears filled Lord Mountdean's eyes as he saw among it a child's crib. He liberally rewarded the man, and then set to work with renewed vigor to endeavor to find out Margaret Dornham's destination.

He went to the railway stations; and, though the only clew he succeeded in obtaining was a very faint one, he had some reason for believing that Margaret Dornham had gone to London.

In that vast city he continued the search, until it really seemed that every inch of ground had been examined. It was all without result—Margaret Dornham and her little foster-child seemed to have vanished.

"What can be the woman's motive?" the earl would cry, in despair. "Why has she taken the child? What does she intend to do with it?"

It never occurred to him that her great, passionate love for the little one was the sole motive for the deed she had done.

The papers were filled with appeals to Margaret Dornham to return to Castledene, or to give some intelligence of her foster-child. The events of the story were talked about everywhere; but, in spite of all that was done and said, Lord Mountdean's heiress remained undiscovered. Months grew into years, and the same mystery prevailed. The earl was desperate at first—his anguish and sorrow were pitiful to witness; but after a time he grew passive in his despair. He never relaxed in his efforts. Every six months the advertisements with the offers of reward were renewed; every six months the story was retold in the papers. It had become one of the common topics of the day. People talked of the Earl of Mountdean's daughter, of her strange disappearance, of the mysterious silence that had fallen over her. Then, as the years passed on, it was agreed that she would never be found, that she must be dead. The earl's truest friends advised him to marry again. After years of bitter disappointment, of anguish and suspense, of unutterable sor-

row and despair, he resigned himself to the entire loss of Madaline's child.

* * * * * * * *

Nature had made Philippa L'Estrange beautiful, circumstances had helped to make her proud. Her father, Lord L'Estrange, died when she was quite a child, leaving her an enormous fortune that was quite under her own control. Her mother, Lady L'Estrange, had but one idea in life, and that was indulging her beautiful daughter in her every caprice. Proud, beautiful, and wealthy, when she most needed her mother's care that mother died, leaving her sole mistress of herself. She was but seventeen then, and was known as one of the wealthiest heiresses and loveliest girls of the day. Her first step was, in the opinion of the world, a wise one; she sent for a widowed cousin, Lady Peters, to live with her as chaperon. For the first year after her mother's death she remained at Verdun Royal, the family estate. After one year given to retirement, Philippa L'Estrange thought she had mourned for her mother after the most exemplary fashion. She was just nineteen when she took her place again in the great world, one of its brightest ornaments.

An afternoon in London in May. The air was clear and fresh; there was in it a faint breath of the budding chestnuts, the hawthorn and lilac; the sun shone clear and bright, yet not too warmly.

On this afternoon Miss L'Estrange sat in the drawing-room of the magnificent family mansion in Hyde Park. The whole world could not have produced a more marvelous picture. The room itself was large, lofty, well proportioned, and superbly furnished; the hangings were of pale-rose silk and white lace; the pictures and statues were gems of art, a superb copy of the Venus of Milo gleaming white and shapely from between the folds of rose silk, also a marble Flora, whose basket was filled with purple heliotropes, and a Psyche that was in itself a dream of beauty; the vases were filled with fairest and most fragrant flowers. Nothing that art, taste, or luxury could suggest was wanting—the eye reveled in beauty. Miss L'Estrange had refurnished the room in accordance with her own ideas of the beautiful and artistic.

The long windows were opened, and through them one saw the rippling of the rich green foliage in the park; the large iron balconies were filled with flowers, fragrant mignonette, lemon-scented verbenas, purple heliotropes, all growing in rich profusion. The spray of the little scented fountain sparkled in the sun. Every one agreed that there was no other room in London like the grand drawing-room at Verdun House.

There was something on that bright May afternoon more beau-

tiful even than the flowers, the fountains, the bright-plumaged birds in their handsome cages, the white statues, or the pictures; that was the mistress and queen of all this magnificence, Philippa L'Estrange. She was reclining on a couch that had been sent from Paris—a couch made of finest ebony, and covered with pale, rose-colored velvet. If Titian or Velasquez had seen her as she lay there, the world would have been the richer by an immortal work of art; Titian alone could have reproduced those rich, marvelous colors; that perfect, queenly beauty. He would have painted the picture, and the world would have raved about its beauty. The dark masses of waving hair; the lovely face with its warm Southern tints; the dark eyes lighted with fire and passion; the perfect mouth with its proud, sweet, imperial, yet tender lips; the white, dimpled chin; the head and face unrivaled in their glorious contour; the straight, dark brows that could frown and yet soften as few other brows could; the white neck, half hidden, half revealed by the coquettish dress; the white rounded arms and beautiful hands—all would have struck the master. Her dress fell round her in folds that would have charmed an artist. It was of some rich, transparent material, the pale amber hue of which enhanced her dark loveliness. The white arms were half shown, half covered by rich lace—in the waves of her dark hair lay a yellow rose. She looked like a woman whose smile could be fatal and dangerous as that of a siren, who could be madly loved or madly hated, yet to whom no man living could be indifferent.

She played for some few minutes with the rings on her fingers, smiling to herself a soft, dreamy smile, as though her thoughts were very pleasant ones; then she took up a volume of poems, read a few lines, and then laid the book down again. The dark eyes, with a gleam of impatience in them, wandered to the clock.

"How slowly those hands move!" she said.

"You are restless," observed a calm, low voice; "watching a clock always makes time seem long."

"Ah, Lady Peters," said the rich, musical tones, "when I cease to be young, I shall cease to be impatient."

Lady Peters, the chosen confidante and chaperon of the brilliant heiress, was an elderly lady whose most striking characteristic appeared to be calmness and repose. She was richly dressed in a robe of black *moire*, and she wore a cap of point lace; her snowy hair was braided back from a broad white brow; her face was kindly, patient, cheerful; her manner, though somewhat stately, the same. She evidently deeply loved the beautiful girl whose bright face was turned to hers.

"He said three in his note, did he not, Lady Peters?"

"Yes, my dear, but it is impossible for any one to be always

strictly punctual; a hundred different things may have detained him."

"But if he were really anxious to see me, he would not let anything detain him," she said.

"Your anxiety about him would be very flattering to him if he knew it," remarked the elder lady.

"Why should I not be anxious? I have always loved him better than the whole world. I have had reason to be anxious."

"Philippa, my dear Philippa, I would not say such things if I were you, unless I had heard something really definite from himself."

The beautiful young heiress laughed a bright, triumphant laugh.

"Something definite from himself! Why, you do not think it likely that he will long remain indifferent to me, even if he be so now—which I do not believe."

"I have had so many disappointments in life that I am afraid of being sanguine," said Lady Peters; and again the young beauty laughed.

"It will seem so strange to see him again. I remember his going away so well. I was very young then—I am young now, but I feel years older. He came down to Verdun Royal to bid us good-by, and I was in the grounds. He had but half an hour to stay, and mamma sent him out to me."

The color deepened in her face as she spoke, and the light shone in her splendid eyes—there was a kind of wild, restless passion in her words.

"I remember it all so well! There had been a heavy shower of rain in the early morning, that had cleared away, leaving the skies blue, the sunshine golden, while the rain-drops still glistened on the trees and the grass. I love the sweet smell of the green leaves and the moist earth after rain. I was there enjoying it when he came to say good-by to me—mamma came with him. 'Philippa,' she said, 'Norman is going; he wants to say good-by to his little wife.' He always calls me his little wife. I saw him look very grave. She went away and left us together. 'You are growing too tall to be called my little wife, Philippa,' he said, and I laughed at his gravity. We were standing underneath a great flowering lilac-tree—the green leaves and the sweet flowers were still wet with the rain. I remember it so well! I drew one of the tall fragrant sprays down, and shaking the rain-drops from it, kissed it. I can smell the rich, moist odor now. I never see a lilac-spray or smell its sweet moisture after rain but that the whole scene rises before me again—I see the proud, handsome face that I love so dearly, the clear skies and the green trees. 'How long shall you be away, Norman?' I asked him. 'Not more than two years,' he replied. 'You will

be quite a brilliant lady of fashion when I return, Philippa; you will have made conquests innumerable.' 'I shall always be the same to you,' I replied; but he made no answer. He took the spray of lilac from my hands. 'My ideas of you will always be associated with lilacs,' he said; and that is why, Lady Peters, I ordered the vases to be filled with lilacs to-day. He bent down and kissed my face. 'Good-by, Philippa,' he said, 'may I find you as good and as beautiful as I leave you.' And then he went away. That is just two years ago; no wonder that I am pleased at his return."

Lady Peters looked anxiously at her.

"There was no regular engagement between you and Lord Arleigh, was there, Philippa?"

"What do you call a regular engagement?" said the young heiress. "He never made love to me, if that is what you mean —he never asked me to be his wife; but it was understood—always understood."

"By whom?" asked Lady Peters.

"My mother and his. When Lady Arleigh lived, she spent a great deal of time at Verdun Royal with my mother; they were first cousins, and the dearest of friends. Hundreds of times I have seen them sitting on the lawn, while Norman and I played together. Then they were always talking about the time when we should be married. 'Philippa will make a beautiful Lady Arleigh,' his mother used to say. 'Norman, go and play with your little wife,' she would add; and with all the gravity of a grown courtier, he would bow before me and call me his little wife."

"But you were children then, and it was perhaps all childish folly."

"It was nothing of the kind," said the heiress, angrily. "I remember well that, when I was presented, my mother said to me, 'Philippa, you are sure to be very much admired; but remember, I consider you engaged to Norman. Your lot in life is settled; you are to be Lady Arleigh of Beechgrove.'"

"But," interposed Lady Peters, "it seems to me, Philippa, that this was all your mother's fancy. Because you played together as children—because, when you were a child, he called you his little wife—because your mother and his were dear friends, and liked the arrangement—it does not follow that he would like it, or that he would choose the playmate of his childhood as the love of his manhood. In all that you have said to me, I see no evidence that he loves you, or that he considers himself in any way bound to you."

"That is because you do not understand. He has been in England only two days, yet, you see, he comes to visit me."

"That may be for old friendship's sake," said Lady Peters.

"Oh, my darling, be careful! Do not give the love of your heart and soul for nothing."

"It is given already," confessed the girl, "and can never be recalled, no matter what I get in return. Why, it is twenty minutes past three; do you think he will come?"

Philippa L'Estrange rose from the couch and went to the long open window.

"I have never seen the sun shine so brightly before," she said; and Lady Peters sighed as she listened. "The world has never looked so beautiful as it does to-day. Oh, Norman, make haste! I am longing to see you."

She had a quaint, pretty fashion of calling Lady Peters by the French appellation *maman*. She turned to her now, with a charming smile. She shook out the perfumed folds of her dress —she smoothed the fine white lace.

"You have not told me, *maman*," she said, "whether I am looking my best to-day. I want Norman to be a little surprised when he sees me. If you saw me for the first time to-day, would you think me nice?"

"I should think you the very queen of beauty," was the truthful answer.

A pleased smile curved the lovely, scarlet lips.

"So will Norman. You will see, *maman*, there is no cause for anxiety, none for fear. You will soon be wondering why you looked so grave over my pretty love story."

"It seems to me," observed Lady Peters, "that it is a one sided story. You love him—you consider yourself betrothed to him. What will you say or do, Philippa, if you find that, during his travels, he has learned to love some one else? He has visited half the courts of Europe since he left here; he must have seen some of the loveliest women in the world. Suppose he has learned to love one—what then?"

The beautiful face darkened.

"What then, *maman?* I know what I should do, even in that case. He belonged to me before he belonged to any one else, and I should try to win him back again."

"But if his word were pledged?"

"He must break his pledge. It would be war to the knife; and I have an idea that in the end I should win."

"But," persisted Lady Peters, "if you lost—what then?"

"Ah, then I could not tell what would happen! Love turns to burning hate at times. If I failed I should seek revenge. But we will not talk of failure. Oh, *maman*, there he is."

How she loved him! At the sound of his footsteps a crimson glow shone in her face, a light shone in the depth of her splendid dark eyes; the scarlet lips trembled. She clenched her fingers lest a sound that might betray her should escape her.

"Lord Arleigh," announced a servant at the door.

Tall, stately, self-possessed, she went forward to greet him. She held out her hand; but words failed her, as she looked once more into the face she loved so well.

"Philippa!" cried the visitor, in tones of wonder. "I expected to find you changed, but I should not have known you."

"Am I so greatly altered?" she asked.

"Altered?" he repeated, "I left you a pretty school-girl—I find you a queen." He bowed low over the white hand.

"The queen bids you welcome," she said, and then after introducing Lady Peters, she added: "Should you not really have known me, Norman?"

He had recovered from his first surprise, and Lady Peters, who watched him closely, fancied that she detected some little embarrassment in his manner. Of one thing she was quite sure —there was admiration and affection in his manner, but there was nothing resembling love.

He greeted her, and then took a seat, not by Philippa's side, but in one of the pretty lounging chairs by the open window.

"How pleasant it is to be home again!" he said. "How pleasant, Philippa, to see you!" And then he began to talk of Lady L'Estrange. "It seems strange," he went on, "that your mother and mine, after being such true friends in life, should die within a few days of each other. I would give the whole world to see my mother again. I shall find Beechgrove so lonely without her."

"I always recognize a good man," put in Lady Peters, "by the great love he bears his mother."

Lord Arleigh smiled.

"Then you think I am a good man?" he interrogated. "I hope, Lady Peters, that I shall never forfeit your good opinion."

"I do not think it likely," said her ladyship.

Philippa grew impatient on finding his attention turned, even for a few moments, from herself.

"Talk to me, Norman," she said; "tell me of your travels— of what you have seen and done—of the new friends you have made."

"I have made no new friends, Philippa," he said; "I love the old ones best."

He did not understand the triumphant expression of the dark eyes as they glanced at Lady Peters. He told her briefly of the chief places that he had visited, and then he said:

"What a quantity of flowers you have, Philippa! You still retain your old love."

She took a spray of lilac from one of the vases and held it before him. Again Lady Peters noted confusion on his face.

"Do you remember the lilac, and what you said about it?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, "I was in Florence last year when they were in flower, and I never looked at the beautiful blooming trees without fancying that I saw my cousin's face among the blossoms."

"Why do you call me 'cousin?'" she asked, impatiently.

He looked up in surprise.

"You are my cousin, are you not, Philippa?"

"I am only your second cousin," she said; "and you have never called me so before."

"I have always called you 'cousin' in my thoughts," he declared. "How remiss I am!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "You will think that I have forgotten what little manners I had. I never congratulated you on your success."

"What success?" she asked, half impatiently.

"I have not been twenty-four hours in London, yet I have heard on all sides of your charms and conquests. I hear that you are the belle of the season—that you have slain dukes, earls, marquises, and baronets indiscriminately. I hear that no one has ever been more popular or more admired that Philippa L'Estrange. Is it all true?"

"You must find out for yourself," she said, laughingly, half disappointed that he had laid the spray of lilac down without any further remark, half disappointed that he should speak in that light, unconcerned fashion about her conquests; he ought to be jealous, but evidently he was not.

Then, to her delight, came a summons for Mrs. Peters; she was wanted in the housekeeper's room.

"Now we are alone," thought Philippa, "he will tell me that he is pleased to see me. He will remember that he called me his little wife."

But, as Lady Peters closed the door, he took a book from the table, and asked her what she had been reading lately—which was the book of that season. She replied to his questions, and to the remarks that followed; but they were not what she wanted to hear.

"Do not talk to me about books, Norman," she cried at last. "Tell me more about yourself; I want to hear more about you."

She did not notice the slight flush that spread over his face.

"If we are to talk about ourselves," he said, "I should prefer you to be the subject. You have grown very beautiful, Philippa."

His eyes took in every detail of the rich amber costume—the waving mass of dark hair—the splendid face, with its scarlet lips and glorious eyes—the white hands that moved so inces-

santly. He owned to himself that in all his travels he had seen nothing like the imperial loveliness of this dark-eyed girl.

"Does it please you to find me what you call beautiful?" she asked, shyly.

"Of course it does. I am very proud of you—proud to be known as the cousin of Philippa L'Estrange."

Nothing more! Had he nothing more than this to be proud of? Was he so blind that he could not see love in the girl's face—so deaf that he could not hear it in the modulations of her musical voice? She bent her beautiful face nearer him.

"We were always good friends, Norman," she said, simply, "you and I?"

"Yes, we were like brother and sister," he responded. "How we quarreled and made friends! Do you remember?"

"Yes—but we were not like brother and sister, Norman. We did not call each other by such names in those days, did we?"

"I never could find names pretty enough for you," he replied, laughingly.

She raised her eyes suddenly to his.

"You cared for me a great deal in those days, Norman," she said, gently. "Tell me the truth—in your travels have you ever met any one for whom you care more?"

He was perfectly calm and unembarrassed.

"No, cousin, I have not. As I told you before, I have really made no friends abroad for whom I care much—a few pleasant acquaintances, nothing more."

"Then I am content," she said.

But he was deaf to the passionate music of her voice. Then the distance between them seemed to grow less. They talked of her home, Verdun Royal; they talked of Beechgrove, and his plans for living there. Their conversation was the intimate exchange of thought of old friends; but there was nothing of love. If she had expected that he would avail himself of Lady Peters' absence to speak of it, she was mistaken. He talked of old times, of friendship, of childhood's days, of great hopes and plans for the future—of anything but love. It seemed to be and perhaps was the farthest from his thoughts.

"I am going to Beechgrove in a week," he said; "you will give me permission to call and see you every day, Philippa?"

"I shall be pleased to see you—my time is yours," she answered; but he did not understand the full meaning of the words.

Then Lady Peters came in and asked if he would join them at dinner.

"Philippa likes gayety," she said; "we have never had one quiet evening since the season began; she has a ball for to-night."

"Yes," laughed the heiress; "the world is very sweet to me just now, Norman; but I will give up my ball and stay at home purposely to sing to you, if you will dine with us."

"That is a temptation I cannot resist," he returned. "I will come. All your disappointed partners will, however, vent their wrath on me, Philippa."

"I can bear it," she said; "and so can you. Now I can let you go more willingly, seeing that I shall soon see you again."

And then he went away. After he had gone she spoke but little; once she clasped her arms round Lady Peters' neck and kissed the kindly face.

"Do not speak to me," she said, "lest I should lose the echo of his voice;" and Lady Peters watched her anxiously, as she stood with a rapt smile on her face, as of one who has heard celestial music in a dream.

* * * * * * * *

The Arleighs of Beechgrove had for many generations been one of the wealthiest as well as one of the noblest families in England. To Norman, Lord Arleigh, who had succeeded his father at the early age of twenty, all this good gift of fame, fortune, and wealth had now fallen. He had inherited also the far-famed Arleigh beauty. He had clear-cut features, a fair skin, a fine manly frame, a broad chest, and erect, military bearing; he had dark hair and eyes, with straight, clear brows, and a fine, handsome mouth, shaded by a dark mustache. Looking at him it was easy to understand his character. There was pride in the dark eyes, in the handsome face, in the high-bred manner and bearing, but not of a common kind.

In accordance with his late father's wish, he had gone through the usual course of studies. He had been to Eton and to Oxford; he had made the usual continental tour; and now he had returned to live as the Arleighs had done before him—a king on his own estate. There was just one thing in his life that had not pleased him. His mother, Lady Arleigh, had always evinced the greatest affection for her cousin, the gentle Lady L'Estrange. She had paid long visits to Verdun Royal, always taking her son with her; and his earliest recollection was of his mother and Lady L'Estrange sitting side by side planning the marriage of their two children, Philippa and Norman. He could even remember many of his mother's pet phrases—"So suitable," "A perfect marriage," "The desire of my heart." He could remember the many references made to it, such as: "When Philippa lives at the Abbey," "When Philippa is Lady Arleigh." All his mother's thoughts and ideas seemed to begin and end there. He had been taught, half seriously, half in jest, to call Philippa his little wife, to pay her every attention, to present her with

jewels and with flowers, to make her his chief study. While he was still a boy he had only laughed at it.

Philippa was a beautiful, high-sprited girl. Her vivacity and animation amused him. He had spoken the truth in saying that he had met no one he liked better than his old friend. He had seen beautiful girls, lovely women, but he had not fallen in love. Indeed, love with the Arleighs was a serious matter. They did not look lightly upon it. Norman, Lord Arleigh, had not fallen in love, but he had begun to think very seriously about Philippa L'Estrange. He had been fond of her as a child, with the kind of affection that often exists between children. He had called her his "little wife" in jest, not in earnest. He had listened to the discussions between the two ladies as he would have listened had they been talking about adding a new wing to the house. It was not until he came to the years of manhood that he began to see how serious the whole matter was. Then he remembered with infinite satisfaction that there had been nothing binding, that he had never even mentioned the word "love" to Philippa L'Estrange, that he had never made love to her, that the whole matter was merely a something that had arisen in the imagination of two ladies.

He was not in the least degree in love with Philippa. She was a brunette—he preferred a blonde; brunette beauty had no charm for him. He liked gentle, fair-haired women, tender of heart and soul—brilliancy did not charm him. Even when, previously to going abroad, he had gone down to Verdun Royal to say good-by, there was not the least approach to love in his heart. He had thought Philippa very charming and very picturesque as she stood under the lilac-trees; he had said truly that he should never see a lilac without thinking of her as she stood there. But that had not meant that he loved her.

He had bent down, as he considered himself in courtesy bound, to kiss her face when he bade her adieu; but it was no lover's kiss that fell so lightly on her lips. He realized to himself most fully the fact that, although he liked her, cared a great deal for her, and felt that she stood in the place of a sister to him, he did not love her.

But about Philippa herself? He was not vain; the proud, stately Lord Arleigh knew nothing of vanity. He could not think that the childish folly had taken deep root in her heart—he would not believe it. She had been a child like himself; perhaps even she had forgotten the nonsense more completely than he himself had. On his return to England, the first thing he heard when he reached London was that his old friend and playfellow—the girl he had called his little wife—was the belle of the season, with half London at her feet.

CHAPTER VII.

Lord Arleigh had been so accustomed to think of Philippa as a child that he could with difficulty imagine the fact that she was now a lovely girl, and one of the wealthiest heiresses in London. He felt some curiosity about her. How would she greet him? How would she receive him? He wrote to her at once, asking permission to visit her, and he came away from that visit with his eyes a little dazzled, his brain somewhat dazed, but his heart untouched. His fancy was somewhat disturbed by the haunting memory of dark, splendid eyes, lighted with fire and passion, and a bright, radiant face and scarlet lips—by a *mélange* of amber, lace, and perfume—but his heart was untouched. She was beautiful beyond his fairest dreams of woman—he owned that to himself—but it was not the kind of beauty that he admired; it was too vivid, too highly colored, too brilliant. He preferred the sweet, pure lily to the queenly rose. Still he said to himself that he had never seen a face or figure like Miss L'Estrange's. No wonder that she had half London at her feet.

He was pleased with her kind reception of him, although he had not read her welcome aright; he was too true a gentleman even to think that it was love which shone in her eyes and trembled on her lips—love which made her voice falter and die away—love which caused her to exert every art and grace of which she was mistress to fascinate him. He was delighted with her—his heart grew warm under the charm of her words, but he never dreamed of love.

He had said to himself that there must be no renewal of his childish nonsense of early days—that he must be careful not to allude to it; to do so would be in bad taste—not that he was vain enough to think she would attach any importance to it, even if he did so; but he was one of nature's gentlemen, and he would have scorned to exaggerate or to say one word more than he meant. Her welcome had been most graceful, most kind—the beautiful face had softened and changed completely for him. She had devoted herself entirely to him; nothing in all the wide world had seemed to her of the least interest except himself and his affairs—books, music, pictures, even herself, her own triumphs, were as nothing when compared with him. He would have been less than mortal not to have been both pleased and flattered.

Pressed so earnestly to return to dinner, he had promised to do so; and evening, the sweet-scented May evening, found him once more at Hyde Park. If anything, Philippa looked more

lovely. She wore her favorite colors—amber and white—a dress of rich amber brocade, trimmed with white lace; the queenly head was circled with diamonds; jewels like fire gleamed on the white breast; there was a cluster of choice flowers in her bodice. He had seen her hitherto as a girl; now he was to see her as the high-bred hostess, the mistress of a large and magnificent mansion.

He owned to himself that she was simply perfect. He had seen nothing in better taste, although he had been on intimate terms with the great ones of the earth. As he watched her, he thought to himself that, high and brilliant as was her station, it was not yet high enough for her. She flung a charm so magical around her that he was insensibly attracted by it, yet he was not the least in love—nothing was further from his thoughts. He could not help seeing that, after a fashion, she treated him differently from her other guests. He could not have told why or how; he felt only a certain subtle difference; her voice seemed to take another tone in addressing him, her face another expression, as though she regarded him as one quite apart from all others.

The dinner-party was a success, as was every kind of entertainment with which Philippa L'Estrange was concerned. When the visitors rose to take their leave, Norman rose also. She was standing near him.

"Do not go yet, Norman," she said; "it is quite early. Stay, and I will sing to you."

She spoke in so low a tone of voice that no one else heard her. He was quite willing. Where could he feel more at home than in this charming drawing-room, with this beautiful girl, his old friend and playmate?

She bade adieu to her visitors, and then turned to him with such a smile as might have lost or won Troy.

"I thought they would never go," she said; "and it seems to me that I have barely exchanged one word with you yet, Norman."

"We have talked many hours," he returned, laughing.

"Ah, you count time by the old fashion, hours and minutes! I forget it when I am talking to one I—to an old friend like you."

"You are enthusiastic," said Lord Arleigh, wondering at the light on the splendid face.

"Nay, I am constant," she rejoined.

And for a few minutes after that silence reigned between them. Philippa was the first to break it.

"Do you remember," she asked, "that you used to praise my voice, and prophesy that I should sing well?"

"Yes, I remember," he replied.

"I have worked hard at my music," she continued, "in the hope of pleasing you."

"In the hope of pleasing me?" he interrogated. "It was kind to think so much of me."

"Of whom should I think, if not of you?" she inquired.

There were both love and reproach in her voice—he heard neither. Had he been as vain as he was proud, he would have been quicker to detect her love for himself.

The windows had been opened because the evening air was so clear and sweet; it came in now, and seemed to give the flowers a sweeter fragrance. Lord Arleigh drew his chair to the piano.

"I want you only to listen," she said. "You will have no turning over to do for me; the songs I love best I know by heart. Shut your eyes, Norman, and dream."

"I shall dream more vividly if I keep them open and look at you," he returned.

Then in a few minutes he began to think he must be in dreamland—the rich, sweet voice, so clear, so soft, so low, was filling the room with sweetest music. It was like no human voice that he remembered; seductive, full of passion and tenderness—a voice that told its own story, that told of its owner's power and charm—a voice that carried away the hearts of the listeners irresistibly, as the strong current carries the leaflet.

She sang of love, mighty, irresistible love, the king before whom all bow down; and as she sang he looked at her. The soft, pearly light of the lamps fell on her glorious face, and seemed to render it more beautiful. He wondered what spell was fast falling over him, for he saw nothing but Philippa's face, heard nothing but the music that seemed to steep his senses as in a dream.

How fatally, wondrously lovely she was, this siren who sang to him of love, until every sense was full of silent ecstasy, until his face flushed, and his heart beat fast. Suddenly his eyes met hers; the scarlet lips trembled, the white fingers grew unsteady; her eyelids drooped, and the sweet music stopped.

She tried to hide her confusion by smiling.

"You should not look at me, Norman," she said, "when I sing; it embarrasses me."

"You should contrive to look a little less beautiful then, Philippa," he rejoined. "What was that last song?"

"It is a new one," she replied, "called 'My Queen.'"

"I should like to read the words," said Lord Arleigh.

In a few minutes she had found it for him, and they bent over the printed page together; her dark hair touched his cheek, the perfume from the white lilies she wore seemed to entrance him; he could not understand the spell that lay over him.

"Is it not beautiful?" she said.

"Yes, beautiful, but ideal; few women, I think, would equal this poet's queen."

"You do not know—you cannot tell, Norman. I think any woman who loves, and loves truly, becomes a queen."

He looked at her, wondering at the passion in her voice—wondering at the expression on her beautiful face.

"You are incredulous," she said; "but it is true. Love is woman's dominion; let her but once enter it, and she becomes a queen; her heart and soul grow grander, the light of love crowns her. It is the real diadem of womanhood, Norman; she knows no other."

He drew back startled; her words seemed to rouse him into sudden consciousness. She was quick enough to see it, and, with the *distrait* manner of a true woman of the world, quickly changed the subject. She asked some trifling question about Beechgrove, and then said, suddenly:

"I should like to see that fine old place of yours, Norman. I was only ten when mamma took me there the last time; that was rather too young to appreciate its treasures. I should like to see it again."

"I hope you will see it, Philippa; I have many curiosities to show you. I have sent home treasures from every great city I have visited."

She looked at him half wonderingly, half wistfully, but he said no more. Could it be that he had no thought of ever asking her to be mistress and queen of this house of his?

"You must have a party in the autumn," she said. "Lady Peters and I must be among your guests."

"That will be an honor. I shall keep you to your word, Philippa." And then he rose to go.

The dark, wistful eyes followed him. She drew a little nearer to him as he held out his hand to say good-night.

"You are quite sure, Norman, that you are pleased to see me again?" she interrogated, gently.

"Pleased! Why, Philippa, of course I am. What a strange question!"

"Because," she said, "there seems to be a cloud—a shadow—between us that I do not remember to have existed before."

"We are both older," he explained, "and the familiarity of childhood cannot exist when childhood ceases to be."

"I would rather be a child forever than that you should change to me," she said, quickly.

"I think," he returned, gravely, "that the only change in me is that I admire you more than I have ever done."

And these words filled her with the keenest sense of rapture;

yet they were but common-place enough, if she had only realized it.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lord Arleigh raised his hat from his brow and stood for a few minutes bareheaded in the starlight. He felt like a man who had been in the stifling atmosphere of a conservatory; warmth and perfume had dazed him. How beautiful Philippa was—how bewildering! What a nameless wondrous charm there was about her! No wonder that half London was at her feet, and that her smiles were eagerly sought. He was not the least in love with her; admiration, homage, liking, but not love—anything but that—filled him; yet he dreamed of her, thought of her, compared her face with others that he had seen—all simply because her beauty had dazed him.

"I can believe now in the sirens of old," he said to himself; "they must have had just such dark, glowing eyes, such rich, sweet voices and beautiful faces. I should pity the man who hopelessly loved Philippa L'Estrange. And, if she ever loves any one, it will be easy for her to win; who could resist her?"

How little he dreamed that the whole passionate love of her heart was given to himself—that to win from him one word of love, a single token of affection, she would have given all that she had in the world.

On the day following he received a note; it said simply:

"DEAR NORMAN: Can you join me in a ride? I have a new horse which they tell me is too spirited. I shall not be afraid to try it if you are with me.

"Yours, PHILIPPA."

He could not refuse—indeed, he never thought of refusing—why should he? The beautiful girl who asked this kindness from him was his old friend and playfellow. He hastened to Verdun House and found Philippa waiting for him.

"I knew you would come," she said. "Lady Peters said you would be engaged. I thought differently."

"You did well to trust me," he returned, laughingly; "it would require a very pressing engagement to keep me from the pleasure of attending you."

He had thought her perfect on the previous evening, in the glitter of jewels and the gorgeous costume of amber and white; yet, if possible, she looked even better on this evening. Her riding-habit was neat and plain, fitting close to the perfect figure, showing every gracious line and curve.

Philippa L'Estrange possessed that rare accomplishment among women, a graceful "seat" on horseback. Lord Arleigh could not help noticing the admiring glances cast on her as they entered the park together. He saw how completely she was queen of society. Unusual homage followed her. She was the observed of all observers; all the men seemed to pause and look at her. Lord Arleigh heard repeatedly, as they rode along, the question, "Who is that beautiful girl?" Every one of note or distinction contrived to speak to her. The Prince of Auboine, at that time the most *féted* guest in England, could hardly leave her. Yet, in the midst of all, Lord Arleigh saw that she turned to him as the sunflower to the sun. No matter with whom she was conversing, she never for one moment forgot him, never seemed inattentive, listened to him, smiled her brightest on him, while the May sun shone, and the white hawthorn flowers fell on the grass—while the birds chirped merrily, and crowds of bright, happy people passed to and fro.

"How true she is to her old friends!" thought Lord Arleigh, when he saw that even a prince could not take her attention from him.

So they rode on through the sunlit air—he fancy free, she loving him every moment with deeper, truer, warmer love.

"I should be so glad, Norman," she said to him, "if you would give me a few riding-lessons. I am sure I need them."

He looked at the graceful figure, at the little hands that held the reins so deftly.

"I do not see what there is to teach you," he observed; "I have never seen any one ride better."

"Still I should be glad of some little instruction from you," she said. "I always liked riding with you, Norman."

"I shall be only too pleased to ride with you every day when I am in town," he told her; and, though he spoke kindly, with smiling lips, there was no warmth of love in his tone.

The day was very warm—the sun had in it all the heat of June. When they reached Verdun House, Philippa said:

"You will come in for a short time, Norman? You look warm and tired. Williams—the butler—is famous for his claret-cup."

He murmured something about being not fatigued, but disinclined for conversation.

"You will not see any one," she said; "you shall come to my own particular little room, where no one dares enter, and we will have a quiet conversation there."

It seemed quite useless to resist her. She had a true siren power of fascination. The next minute saw him seated in the cool, shady *boudoir*, where the mellow light came in, rose-filtered through the silken blinds, and the perfumed air was sweet. Lady Peters, full of solicitude, was there, with the iced claret-

cup, thinking he was tired and warm. It was so like home that he could not help feeling happy.

Presently Lady Peters retired for a few minutes, and in came Philippa. She had changed her riding-costume for a white silk *négligé* that fell round her in loose, graceful folds. She wore no flowers, jewels, or ribbons, but the dark masses of her hair were unfastened, and hung round the white neck; there was a warm, bright flush on her face, with the least touch of languor in her manner. She threw herself back in her lounging chair, saying, with a dreamy smile:

"You see that I make no stranger of you, Norman."

From beneath the white silken folds peeped a tiny embroidered slipper; a jeweled fan lay near her, and with it she gently stirred the perfumed air. He watched her with admiring eyes.

"You look like a picture that I have seen, Philippa," he said.

"What picture?" she asked, with a smile.

"I cannot tell you, but I am quite sure I have seen one like you. What picture would you care to resemble?"

A sudden gleam of light came into her dark eyes.

"The one underneath which you would write 'My Queen,'" she said, hurriedly.

He did not understand.

"I think every one with an eye to beauty would call you 'queen,'" he observed, lightly. The graver meaning of her speech had quite escaped him.

Then Lady Peters returned, and the conversation changed.

"We are going to hear an *opéra-bouffe* to-night," said Philippa, when Lord Arleigh was leaving. "Will you come and be our escort?"

"You will have a box filled with noisy chatterers the whole night," he remarked, laughingly.

"They shall all make room for you, Norman, if you will come," she said. "It is 'La Grande Duchesse,' with the far-famed Madame Schneider as her Grace of Gérolstein."

"I have not heard it yet," returned Lord Arleigh. "I cannot say that I have any great admiration for that school of music, but, if you wish it, I will go, Philippa.

"It will increase my enjoyment a hundredfold," she said, gently, "if you go."

"How can I refuse when you say that? I will be here punctually," he promised; and again the thought crossed his mind how true she was to her old friends—how indifferent to new ones!

On that evening Philippa changed her customery style of dress—it was no longer the favorite amber, so rich in hue and in texture, but white, gleaming silk, relieved by dashes of crimson. A more artistic or beautiful dress could not have been designed.

She wore crimson roses in her dark hair, and a cluster of crimson roses on her white breast. Her bouquet was of the same odorous flowers.

In the theater Lord Arleigh noticed that Philippa attracted more attention than any one else, even though the house was crowded; he saw opera-glasses turned constantly toward her beautiful face.

Miss L'Estrange kept her word, saying but little to those who would fain have engrossed her whole attention—that was given to Lord Arleigh. She watched his face keenly throughout the performance. He did not evince any great interest in it.

"You do not care for 'La Grande Duchesse?'" she said, suddenly.

"No—frankly, I do not," he replied.

"Tell me why," said Philippa.

"Can you ask me to do so, Philippa?" he returned, surprised; and then he added, "I will tell you. First of all, despite the taking music, it is a performance to which I should not care to bring my wife and sister."

"Tell me why?" she said, again.

"It lowers my idea of womanhood. I could not forgive the woman, let her be duchess or peasant, who could show any man such great love, who could lay herself out so deliberately to win a man."

She looked at him gravely. He continued:

"Beauty is very charming, I grant—as are grace and talent; but the chief charm to me of a woman is her modesty, just as the great charm of a lily is its whiteness. Do you not agree with me, Philippa?"

"Yes," she replied, "most certainly I do; but, Norman, you are hard upon us. Suppose that woman loves a man ever so truly—she must not make any sign?"

"Any sign she might make would most certainly, in my opinion, lessen her greatest charm," he said.

"But," she persisted, "do you not think that is rather hard? Why must a woman never evince a preference for the man she loves?"

"Woman should be wooed—never be wooer," said Lord Arleigh.

"Again I say you are hard, Norman. According to you, a woman is to break her heart in silence and sorrow for a man, rather than give him the least idea that she cares for him."

"I should say there is a happy medium between the Duchess of Gérolstein and a broken heart. Neither men nor women can help their peculiar disposition, but in my opinion a man never cares less for a woman than when he sees she wants to win his liking."

He spoke with such perfect freedom from all consciousness that she knew the words could not be intended for her; nevertheless she had learned a lesson from them.

"I am like yourself, Norman," she said; "I do not care for the play at all; we will go home," and they left the house before the Grand Duchess had played her part.

CHAPTER IX.

Philippa L'Estrange thought long and earnestly over her last conversation with Lord Arleigh. She had always loved him; but the chances are that, if he had been devoted to her on his return, if he had wooed her as others did, she would have been less *empressée.* As it was, he was the only man she had not conquered, the only one who resisted her, on whom her fascinations fell without producing a magical effect. She could not say she had conquered her world while he was unsubdued. Yet how was it? She asked herself that question a hundred times each day. She was no coquette, no flirt, yet she knew she had but to smile on a man to bring him at once to her feet; she had but to make the most trifling advance, and she could do what she would. The Duke of Mornton had twice repeated his offer of marriage—she had refused him. The Marquis of Langland, the great match of the day, had made her an offer, which she had declined. The Italian Prince Cetti would have given his possessions to take her back with him to his own sunny land, but she had refused to go. No woman in England had had better offers of marriage; but she had refused them all. How was it that, when others sighed so deeply and vainly at her feet, Lord Arleigh alone stood aloof?

Of what use were her beauty, wit, grace, wealth, and talent, if she could not win him? For the first time she became solicitous about her beauty, comparing it with that of other women, always being compelled, in the end, to own that she excelled. If Lord Arleigh talked, or danced, or showed attention to any lady, she would critically examine her claim to interest, whether she was beautiful, mentally gifted, graceful. But Philippa detected another thing—if Lord Arleigh did not love her, it was at least certain that he loved no one else.

The whole world was spoiled for her because she had not this man's love. She desired it. Her beauty, her wealth, her talents, her grace, were all as nothing, because with them she could not win him. Then, again, she asked herself, could it be that she could not win him? What had men told her? That

her beauty was irresistible. It might be that he did care for her, that he intended to carry out his mother's favorite scheme, but that he was in no hurry, that he wanted her and himself to see plenty of life first. It was easier, after all, to believe that than to think that she had completely failed to win him. She would be quite satisfied if it were so, although it was certainly not flattering to her that he should be willing to wait so long; but, if he would only speak—if he would only say the few words that would set her mind quite at ease—she would be content.

Why did he not love her? She was fair, young, endowed with great gifts; she had wealth, position; she had the claim upon him that his mother and hers had wished the alliance. Why did she fail? why did he not love her? It seemed to her that she was the one person in all the world to whom he would naturally turn—that, above all others, he would select her for his wife; yet he did not evince the least idea of so doing. Why was it?

Twice that night when he had so frankly told her his ideas about women, she had been most careful, most reserved.

"If he likes reserve and indifference," she said to herself, "he shall have plenty of it." Yet it was at the same time so mixed with kindness, with thoughtful consideration for him, that the wonder was he did not succumb. "I must find out," she said to herself, "whether he does really care for me." How to do so she did not quite know—but woman's wits are proverbially keen.

The more she saw of him the better she liked him—his single-mindedness, his chivalry, his faith in women and his respect for them, were greater than she had seen in any other, and she loved him for these qualities. The more she contrasted him with others, the greater, deeper, and wider grew her love. It must be that in time he should care for her.

The Duchess of Aytoun gave a grand ball, to which, as belle of the season, Philippa was invited.

"Shall you go?" she asked of Lord Arleigh.

"I have hardly decided," he replied.

"Do go, Norman; I like waltzing, but I do not care to waltz with every one. Do go, that I may dance with you."

"You do not mind waltzing with me, then?" he said.

The glance she gave him was answer sufficient. He could not help feeling flattered.

"I shall be there, Philippa," he said; and then she promised herself on that evening she would try to discover what his sentiments were with regard to her.

She took great pains with her toilet; she did not wish to startle, but to attract—and the two things were very different. Her

dress looked brilliant, being of a silvery texture; the trimming was composed of small fern-leaves; a *parure* of fine diamonds crowned her head.

The effect of the dress was striking, and Philippa herself had never looked more lovely. There was a flush of rose-color on her face, a light in her eyes. If ever woman's face told a story, hers did—if ever love softened, made more tender and pure any face on earth, it was hers.

After her toilet was complete, she stood for a few minutes looking in her mirror. The tall, stately figure in the glorious dress was perfect; the face, framed in shining masses of dark hair, was perfect too.

"If I can but win one word from him!" she thought. "If I can but remind him of those childish days when he used to call me his little wife!"

She no sooner made her appearance than, as was usual, she was surrounded by a little court of admirers—the Duke of Mornton first among them. They little guessed that they owed her complacent reception of their compliments to the fact that she was not even attending to them, but with her whole soul in her eyes was watching for Lord Arleigh's arrival. The duke even flattered himself that he was making some progress, because at some chance word from him the beautiful face flushed a deep crimson. How was he to know that Lord Arleigh had at that moment entered the room?

The latter could not help feeling pleased and flattered at the way in which Philippa received him. He was but mortal, and he could not help seeing the dark eyes shine, the scarlet lips tremble, the whole face soften. Presently she placed her hand on his arm, and walked away with him.

"I was growing impatient, Norman," she said; and then, remembering his criticisms on the wooing of women, she hastened to add—"impatient at the want of novelty; it seems to me that in London ball-rooms all the men talk in the same fashion."

Lord Arleigh laughed.

"What are they to do, Philippa?" he asked. "They have each one the same duties to perform—to please their partners and amuse themselves. You would not have a 'hapless lordling' talk about science or metaphysics while he danced, would you?"

"No; but they might find some intelligent remarks to make. You talk well, Norman, and listening to you makes me impatient with others."

"You are very kind," he said, and he took the pretty tablets from her hand.

"You have saved every waltz for me, Philippa. I shall expect to have a dozen duels on my hands before morning."

"This is my favorite," she said, as the music of the irresistible "Blue Danube" filled the room.

Then it seemed to her that they floated away into another sphere. His arm was round her, his eyes smiling down into hers. With youth, music, beauty, love, there was nothing wanting to complete the charm.

When it was over, he asked her if she would rest.

"No," said Philippa; "I heard the playing of a fountain in the fernery. I should like to go there."

They went through the magnificent suite of rooms, and then through the conservatory into the dim, beautiful fernery, where the lamps glowed like stars, and the cool rippling water fell with a musical rhythm into the deep basin below. They could hear the distant sound of music from the ball-room. It was a time when love, if it lay in a man's heart, would spring into sweet, sudden life.

"If he loves me," she said to herself, "he will tell me so now."

"I like this better than the ball-room," she said. "By the way, you have not told me if you like my dress?" she added, anxious to bring him to the one subject she had at heart. "Do you remember that when we were children, Norman, you used to criticise my dress?"

"Did I? It was very rude of me. I should not venture to criticise anything so marvelous now. It is a wonderful dress, Philippa; in the light it looks like moonbeams, in the shade like snow. Do you suppose I should ever have the courage to criticise anything so beautiful?"

"Do you really like it, Norman—without flattery?"

"I never flatter, Philippa, not even in jest; you should know that."

"I never heard you flatter," she acknowledged. "I took pains with my toilet, Norman, to please you; if it does so I am well content."

"There is another waltz," said Lord Arleigh; "we will go back to the ball-room."

"Make him love me!" she said to herself, in bitter disdain. "I might as well wish for one of the stars as for his love—it seems just as far off."

CHAPTER X.

Lord Arleigh did not go to Beechgrove as he had intended. He found so many old friends and so many engagements in London that he was not inclined to leave it. Then, too, he began to notice many little things which made him feel uncom-

fortable. He began to perceive that people considered him in some kind of way as belonging to Miss L'Estrange; no matter how many surrounded her, when he entered a room they were seen one by one to disappear until he was left alone by her side. At first he believed this to be accidental; after a time he knew that it must be purposely done.

Miss L'Estrange, too, appeared to see and hear him only. If any one wanted to win a smile from her lovely lips, he had but to make way for Lord Arleigh; if any man wanted a kind word, or a kind glance from the beautiful eyes, he had but to praise Lord Arleigh. People soon perceived all this. The last to discover it was Lord Arleigh himself. It dawned but slowly upon him. He began to perceive also that Philippa, after a fashion of her own, appropriated him. She looked upon it as a settled arrangement that he should ride with her every day—that every day he must either lunch or dine with them—that he must be her escort to theater and ball. If he at times pleaded other engagements, she would look at him with an air of childish wonder, and say:

"They cannot have so great a claim upon you as I have, Norman?"

Then he was disconcerted, and knew not what to answer; it was true that there was no one with so great a claim—it seemed to have been handed down from his mother to him.

His eyes were still further opened one day when a large and fashionable crowd had gathered at Lady Dalton's garden-party. Philippa was, as heretofore, the belle, looking more than usually lovely in a light gossamer dress of white and pink. She was surrounded by admirers. Lord Arleigh stood with a group of gentlemen under a great spreading beech-tree.

"How beautiful she is, that Miss L'Estrange!" said one—Sir Alfred Martindale. "I can believe in the siege of Troy when I look at her; and I think it just as well for mankind that such women are rare."

"If ever there was a human moth," observed another, "it is that unfortunate Duke of Mornton. I have seen some desperate cases in my time, but none so desperate as his."

Lord Arleigh laughed. They were all intimate friends.

"The Duke of Mornton is a great friend of mine," he said. "I can only hope that he may be saved from the ultimate fate of a moth, and that Miss L'Estrange will take pity on him."

He could not help seeing that the three gentleman looked up with an expression of utter wonder.

"Do you mean," asked Sir Alfred, "that you hope Miss L'Estrange will marry the duke?"

"I do not think she could do better," replied Lord Arleigh.

"You are the last man in London I should have expected to hear say so," said Sir Alfred, quietly.

"Am I? Pray may I ask why?"

"Yes, if you acquit me of all intention of rudeness in my reply. I repeat that you are the last man in London whom I should have expected to hear make such a remark, for the simple reason that every one believes you are going to marry Miss L'Estrange yourself."

Lord Arleigh's face flushed hotly.

"Then 'every one,' as you put it, Sir Alfred, takes a great liberty—an unauthorized liberty—with the name of a very charming lady. Miss L'Estrange and myself were much together when children—our mothers were distantly related—and at the present time we are—excellent friends."

"I am sorry," returned Sir Alfred, "if I have said anything to annoy you. I thought the fact was as evident as the sun at noon-day; every one in London believes it."

"Then people take an unwarrantable liberty with the lady's name," said Lord Arleigh.

Some one else remarked, with a slightly impertinent drawl, that he did not believe Miss L'Estrange would consider it a liberty. A flash from Lord Arleigh's dark eyes silenced him.

A few minutes afterward Lord Arleigh found the Duchess of Aytoun and Philippa seated underneath a large acacia-tree. Captain Gresham, a great favorite in the London world, was by Philippa's side. The duchess, with a charming gesture of invitation, made room for Lord Arleigh by her side. The gallant captain did not often find an opportunity of making love to the belle of the season. Now that he had found it, he was determined not to lose it—not for fifty Lord Arleighs. So, while the duchess talked to the new-comer, he relentlessly pursued his conversation with Miss L'Estrange.

There was but one music in the world for her, and that was the music of Lord Arleigh's voice. Nothing could ever drown that for her. The band was playing, the captain talking, the duchess conversing, in her gay, animated fashion; but above all, clearly and distinctly, Philippa heard every word that fell from Lord Arleigh's lips, although he did not know it. He believed that she was, as she seemed to be, listening to the captain.

"I have pleasing news concerning you, Lord Arleigh," said the duchess. "I wonder if I may congratulate you?"

"What is it? I do not know of anything very interesting concerning myself," he remarked—"nothing, I am sure, that calls for congratulation."

"You are modest," said the duchess; "but I have certainly

heard, and on good authority, too, that you are about to be married."

"I can only say I was not in the least aware of it," he rejoined.

The duchess raised her parasol and looked keenly at him.

"Pray pardon me," she continued; "do not think that it is from mere curiosity that I ask the question. Is there really no truth in the report?"

"None whatever," he replied. "I have no more idea of being married than I have of sailing this moment for the Cape."

"It is strange," said the duchess, musingly; "I had the information from such good authority, too."

"There can be no better authority on the subject," said Lord Arleigh, laughingly, "than myself."

"You; I admit that. Well, as the ice is broken, Lord Arleigh, and we are old friends, I may ask, why do you not marry?"

"Simply because of marriage, and of love that ends in marriage, I have not thought," he answered lightly.

"It is time for you to begin," observed the duchess; "my own impression is that a man does no good in the world until he is married." And then she added: "I suppose you have an ideal of womanhood?"

Lord Arleigh's face flushed.

"Yes," he acknowledged, "I have an ideal of my own, derived from poetry I have read, from pictures I have seen—an ideal of perfect grace, loveliness, and purity. When I meet that ideal, I shall meet my fate."

"Then you have never yet seen the woman you would like to marry?" pursued the duchess.

"No," he answered, quite seriously; "strange to say, although I have seen some of the fairest and noblest types of womanhood, I have not yet met with my ideal."

They were disturbed by a sudden movement—the flowers that Philippa held in her hand had fallen to the ground.

CHAPTER XI.

Captain Greshan sprang forward to lift the flowers which Miss L'Estrange had dropped.

"Nay," she said, "never mind them. A fresh flower is very nice. A flower that has once been in the dust has lost its beauty."

There was no trace of pain in the clear voice; it was rich and musical. Philippa L'Estrange, seated in the bright sunshine,

heard the words that were to her a death-warrant, yet made no sign. "I have not yet met with my ideal," Lord Arleigh had said.

Captain Gresham picked up some of the fallen flowers.

"A dead flower from your hand, Miss L'Estrange," he observed, "is worth a whole gardenful of living ones from any one else."

She laughed again that sweet musical laugh which seemed to come only from a happy heart; and then she looked round. The Duchess of Aytoun and Lord Arleigh were still in deep converse. Miss L'Estrange turned to Captain Gresham.

"I have been told," she said, "that there are some beautiful white hyacinths here; they are my favorite flowers. Shall we find them?"

He was only too pleased. She bade a laughing adieu to the duchess, and smiled at Lord Arleigh. There was no trace of pain or of sadness in her voice or face. They went away together, and Lord Arleigh never even dreamed that she had heard his remark.

Then the duchess left him, and he sat under the spreading beech alone. His thoughts were not of the pleasantest nature; he did not like the general belief in his approaching marriage; it was fair neither to himself nor to Philippa—yet how was he to put an end to such gossip? Another idea occurred to him. Could it be possible that Philippa herself shared the idea? He would not believe it. Yet many things made him pause and think. She certainly evinced great preference for his society; she was never so happy as when with him. She would give up any engagement, any promised gayety or pleasure to be with him. She dressed to please him; she consulted him on most things; she seemed to identify her interests with his. But all this might be the result of their old friendship—it might have nothing to do with love.

Could it be possible that she still remembered the childish nonsense that had passed between them—that she considered either herself or him bound by a foolish tie that neither of them had contracted? Could it be possible that she regarded herself as engaged to him? The bare idea of it seemed absurd to him; he could not believe it. Yet many little things that he could not explain to himself made him feel uncomfortable and anxious. Could it be that she, the most beautiful and certainly the most popular woman in London, cared so much for him as to hold him by so slender a tie as their past childish nonsense?

He reproached himself for the thought, yet, do what he would, he could not drive it away. The suspicion haunted him; it made him miserable. If it was really so, what was he to do?

He was a gentleman, not a coxcomb. He could not go to this fair woman and ask her if it was really true that she loved him, if she really cared for him, if she held him by a tie contracted in childhood. He could not do it. He had not sufficient vanity. Why should he think that Philippa, who had some of the noblest men in England at her feet—why should he think that she would renounce all her brilliant prospects for him? Yet, if the mistake had really occurred—if she really thought the childish nonsense binding—if she really believed that he was about to make her his wife—it was high time that she was undeceived, that she knew the truth. And the truth was that although he had a great liking, a kindly affection for her, he was not in love with her. He admired her beauty—nay, he went further; he thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, the most gifted, the most graceful. But he was not in love with her—never would be. She was not his type of woman, not his ideal. If she had been his sister, he would have loved her exceedingly—a brotherly affection was what he felt for her.

Yet how could he go to this fair woman with the ungracious words that he did not love her, and had no thought of marrying her? His face flushed hotly at the thought—there was something in it against which his whole manhood rose in hot rebellion. Still it must be done; there must be no such shadow between them as this—there must be no such fatal mistake. If the report of their approaching marriage were allowed to remain much longer uncontradicted, why, then he would be in honor compelled to fulfill public expectations; and this he had no intention, no desire to do. The only thing therefore was to speak plainly to her.

How he hated the thought! How he loathed the idea! It seemed to him unmanly, most ignoble—and yet there was no help for it. There was one gleam of comfort for him, and only one. She was so quick, so keen, that she would be sure to understand him at once, without his entering into any long explanation. Few words would suffice, and those words he must choose as best he could. If it were possible, he would speak to her to-day—the sooner the better—and then all uncertainty would be ended. It seemed to him, as he pondered these things, that a cloud had fallen over the sunshine. In his heart he blamed the folly of that gentle mother who had been the cause of all this anxiety.

"Such matters are always best left alone," he said to himself. "If I should ever have children of my own, I will never interfere in their love affairs."

Think as he would, ponder as he would, it was no easy task that lay before him—to tell her in so many words that he did

not love her. Surely no man had ever had anything so ungracious to do before.

He looked round the grounds, and presently saw her the center of a brilliant group near the lake. The Duke of Ashwood was by her side, the *élite* of the guests had gathered round her. She—beautiful, bright, animated—was talking, as he could see, with her usual grace and ease. It struck him suddenly as absurd that this beautiful woman should care—as people said she did care—for him.

Let him get it all over. He longed to see the bright face shine on him with sisterly kindness, and to feel himself at ease with her; he longed to have all misunderstanding done away with.

He went up to the little group, and again the same peculiarity struck him—they all made way for him—even the Duke of Ashwood, although he did it with a frown on his face and an angry look in his eyes. Each one seemed to consider that he had some special right to be by the side of the beautiful Miss L'Estrange; and she, as usual when he was present, saw and heard no one else.

It was high time the world was disabused. Did she herself join in the popular belief? He could not tell. He looked at the bright face; the dark eyes met his, but he read no secret in them.

"Philippa," he said, suddenly, "the water looks very tempting—would you like a row?"

"Above everything else," she replied. And they went off in the little pleasure-boat together.

It was a miniature lake, tall trees bordering it and dipping their green branches into the water. The sun shone on the feathered spray that fell from the sculls, the white swans raised their graceful heads as the little boat passed by, and Philippa lay back languidly, watching the shadow of the trees. Suddenly an idea seemed to occur to her. She looked at Lord Arleigh.

"Norman," she said, "let the boat drift—I want to talk to you, and I cannot while you are rowing."

He rested on his sculls, and the boat drifted under the drooping branches of a willow-tree. He never forgot the picture that then presented itself—the clear deep water, the green trees, and the beautiful face looking at him.

"Norman," she said, in a clear, low voice, "I want to tell you that I overheard all that you said to the Duchess of Aytoun. I could not help it—I was so near to you."

She was taking the difficulty into her own hands! He felt most thankful.

"Did you, Philippa? I thought you were engrossed with the gallant captain."

"Did you really and in all truth mean what you said to her?" she asked.

"Certainly; you know me well enough to be quite sure that I never say what I do not mean."

"You have never yet seen the woman whom you would ask to be your wife?" she said.

There was a brief silence, and then he replied:

"No, in all truth, I have not, Philippa."

A little bird was singing on a swaying bough just above them—to the last day of her life it seemed to her that she remembered the notes. The sultry silence seemed to deepen. She broke it.

"But, Norman," she said, in a low voice, "have you not seen me?"

He tried to laugh to hide his embarrassment, but it was a failure.

"I have seen you—and I admire you. I have all the affection of a brother for you, Philippa——" and then he paused abruptly.

"But," she supplied, "you have never thought of making me your wife? Speak to me quite frankly, Norman."

"No, Philippa, I have not."

"As matters stand between us, they require explanation," she said; and he saw her lips grow pale. "It is not pleasant for me to have to mention it, but I must do it. Norman, do you quite forget what we were taught to believe when we were children—that our lives were to be passed together?"

"My dearest Philippa, pray spare yourself and me. I did not know that you even remembered that childish nonsense."

She raised her dark eyes to his face, and there was something in them before which he shrank as one who feels pain.

"One word, Norman—only one word. That past which has been so much to me—that past in which I have lived, even more than in the present or the future—am I to look upon it as what you call nonsense?"

He took her hand in his.

"My dear Philippa," he said, "I hate myself for what I have to say—it makes me detest even the sound of my own voice. Yet you are right—there is nothing for us but perfect frankness; anything else would be foolish. Neither your mother nor mine had any right to try to bind us. Such things never answer, never prosper. I cannot myself imagine how they, usually so sensible, came in this instance to disregard all dictates of common sense. I have always looked upon the arrangement as

mere nonsense; and I hope you have done the same. You are free as air—and so am I."

She made no answer, but, after a few minutes, when she had regained her self-possession, she said:

"The sun is warm on the water—I think we had better return;" and, as they went back, she spoke to him carelessly about the new rage for garden-parties.

"Does she care or not?" thought Lord Arleigh to himself. "Is she pleased or not? I cannot tell; the ways of women are inscrutable. Yet a strange idea haunts me—an uncomfortable suspicion."

As he watched her, there seemed to him no trace of anything but light-hearted mirth and happiness about her. She laughed and talked; she was the center of attraction, the life of the *fête*. When he spoke to her, she had a careless jest, a laughing word for him; yet he could not divest himself of the idea that there was something behind all this. Was it his fancy, or did the dark eyes wear every now and then an expression of anguish? Was it his fancy, or did it really happen that when she believed herself unobserved, the light died out of her face?

He was uncomfortable, without knowing why—haunted by a vague, miserable suspicion he could not explain, by a presentiment he could not understand—compelled against his will to watch her, yet unable to detect anything in her words and manner that justified his doing so. It had been arranged that after the *fête* he should return to Verdun House with Lady Peters and Philippa. He had half promised to dine and spend the evening there, but now he wondered if that arrangement would be agreeable to Philippa. He felt that some degree of restraint had arisen between them.

He was thinking what excuse he could frame, when Philippa sent for him. He looked into the fresh young face; there was no cloud on it.

"Norman," she said, "I find that Lady Peters has asked Miss Byrton to join us at dinner—will you come now? It has been a charming day, but I must own that the warmth of the sun has tired me."

Her tone of voice was so calm, so unruffled, he could have laughed at himself for his suspicions, his fears.

"I am quite ready," he replied. "If you would like the carriage ordered, we will go at once."

He noticed her going home more particularly than he had ever done before. She was a trifle paler, and there was a languid expression in her dark eyes which might arise from fatigue, but she talked lightly as usual. If anything, she was even kinder to him than usual, never evincing the least consciousness of

what had happened. Could it have been a dream? Never was man so puzzled as Lord Arleigh.

They talked after dinner about a grand fancy ball that Miss Byrton intended giving at her mansion in Grosvenor Square. She was one of those who believed implicitly in the engagement between Lord Arleigh and Miss L'Estrange.

"I have a Waverley quadrille already formed," said Miss Byrton—"that is *de rigueur*. There could not be a fancy ball without a Waverley quadrille. How I should like two Shakesperian ones! I thought of having one from 'As You Like It' and another from 'Romeo and Juliet;' and, Miss L'Estrange, I wish you would come as *Juliet*. It seems rude even to suggest a character to any one with such perfect taste as yours—still I should like a beautiful *Juliet—Juliet* in white satin, and glimmer of pearls."

"I am quite willing," returned Philippa. "*Juliet* is one of my favorite heroines. How many *Romeos* will you have?"

"Only one, if I can so manage it," replied Miss Byrton—"and that will be Lord Arleigh."

She looked at him as she spoke; he shook his head, laughingly.

"No—I yield to no one in reverence for the creations of the great poet," he said; "but, to tell the truth, I do not remember that the character of *Romeo* ever had any great charm for me."

"Why not?" asked Miss Byrton.

"I cannot tell you; I am very much afraid that I prefer *Othello* —the noble Moor. Perhaps it is because sentiment has not any great attraction for me. I do not think I could ever kill myself for love. I should make a sorry *Romeo*, Miss Byrton."

With a puzzled face she looked from him to Miss L'Estrange.

"You surprise me," she said, quickly. "I should have thought *Romeo* a character above all others to please you."

Philippa has listened with a smile—nothing had escaped her. Looking up, she said, with a bright laugh:

"I cannot compliment you on being a good judge of character, Miss Byrton. It may be perhaps that you have not known Lord Arleigh well enough. But he is the last person in the world to make a good *Romeo*. I know but one character in Shakespeare's plays that would suit him."

"And that?" interrogated Lord Arleigh.

"That," replied Philippa, "is *Petruchio;*" and amidst a general laugh the conversation ended.

Miss Byrton was the first to take her departure. Lord Arleigh lingered for some little time—he was still unconvinced. The wretched, half-formed suspicion that there was something hidden beneath Philippa's manner still pursued him; he wanted to see if she was the same to him. There was indeed no percepti-

ble difference. She leaned back in her favorite chair with an air of relief, as though she were tired of visitors.

"Now let us talk about the *fête*, Norman," she said. "You are the only one I care to talk with about my neighbors."

So for half an hour they discussed the *fête*, the dresses, the music, the different flirtations—Philippa in her usual bright, laughing, half-sarcastic fashion, with the keen sense of humor that was peculiar to her. Lord Arleigh could not see that there was any effort in her conversation; he could not see the least shadow on her brightness; and at heart he was thankful.

When he was going away, she asked him about riding on the morrow just as usual. He could not see the slightest difference in her manner. That unpleasant little conversation on the lake might never have taken place for all the remembrance of it that seemed to trouble her. Then, when he rose to take his leave, she held out her hand with a bright, amused expression.

"Good-night, *Petruchio*," she said. "I am pleased at the name I have found for you."

"I am not so sure that it is appropriate," he rejoined. "I think on the whole I would rather love a *Juliet* than tame a shrew."

"It may be in the book of fate that you will do both," she observed; and they parted, laughing at the idea.

To the last the light shone in her eyes, and the scarlet lips were wreathed in smiles; but, when the door had closed behind him and she was alone, the haggard, terrible change that fell over the young face was painful to see. The light, the youth, the beauty seemed all to fade from it; it grew white, stricken, as though the pain of death were upon her. She clasped her hands as one who had lost all hope.

"How am I to bear it?" she cried. "What am I to do?" She looked round her with the bewildered air of one who had lost her way—with the dazed appearance of one from beneath whose feet the plank of safety had been withdrawn. It was all over—life was all over; the love that had been her life was suddenly taken from her. Hope was dead—the past in which she had lived was all a plank—he did not love her.

She said the words over and over again to herself. He did not love her, this man to whom she had given the passionate love of her whole heart and soul—he did not love her, and never intended to ask her to be his wife.

Why, she had lived for this! This love, lying now in ruins around her, had been her existence. Standing there, in the first full pain of her despair, she realized what that love had been—her life, her hope, her world. She had lived in it; she had known no other wish, no other desire. It had been her all and now it was less than nothing.

"How am I to live and bear it?" she asked herself again; and the only answer that came to her was the dull echo of her own despair.

That night, while the sweet flowers slept under the light of the stars, and the little birds rested in the deep shade of the trees—while the night wind whispered low, and the moon sailed in the sky—Philippa L'Estrange, the belle of the season, one of the most beautiful women in London, one of the wealthiest heiresses in England, wept through the long hours—wept for the overthrow of her hope and her love, wept for the life that lay in ruins around her.

She was of dauntless courage—she knew no fear; but she did tremble and quail before the future stretching out before her—the future that was to have no love, and was to be spent without him.

How was she to bear it? She had known no other hope in life, no other dream. What had been childish nonsense to him had been to her a serious and exquisite reality. He had either forgotten it, or had thought of it only with annoyance; she had made it the very corner-stone of her life.

It was not only a blow of the keenest and cruelest kind to her affections, but it was the cruelest blow her vanity could have possibly received. To think that she, who had more admirers at her feet than any other woman in London, should have tried so hard to win this one, and have failed—that her beauty, her grace, her wit, her talent, should all have been lavished in vain.

Why did she fail so completely? Why had she not won his love? It was given to no other—at least she had the consolation of knowing that. He had talked about his ideal, but he had not found it; he had his own ideal of womanhood, but he had not met with it.

"Are other women fairer, more lovable than I am?" she asked herself. "Why should another win where I have failed?"

So through the long hours of the starlit night she lamented the love and the wreck of her life, she mourned for the hope that could never live again, while her name was on the lips of men who praised her as the queen of beauty, and fair women envied her as one who had but to will and to win.

She would have given her whole fortune to win his love—not once, but a hundred times over.

It seemed to her a cruel mockery of fate that she who had everything the world could give—beauty, health, wealth, fortune—should ask but this one gift, and that it should be refused her.

She watched the stars until they faded from the skies, and then she buried her face in the pillow and sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

It was when the sun, shining into her room, reached her that an idea occurred to Philippa which was like the up-springing of new life to her. All was not yet lost. He did not love her—he had not thought of making her his wife; but it did not follow that he would never do so. What had not patience and perseverance accomplished before now? What had not love won?

He had acknowledged that she was beautiful; he had owned to her often how much he admired her. So much granted, was it impossible that he should learn to love her? She told herself that she would take courage—that she would persevere—that her great love must in time prevail, and that she would devote her life unweariedly to it.

She would carefully hide all traces of pique or annoyance. She would never let him find her dull or unhappy. Men liked to be amused. She would do her best to entertain him; he should never have a moment's vacancy in her society. She would find sparkling anecdotes, repartees, witty, humorous stories, to amuse him. He liked her singing; she would cultivate it more and more. She would study him, dress for him, live for him, and him alone; she would have no other end, aim, thought, or desire. She would herself be the source of all his amusement, so that he should look for the every-day pleasures of his life to her—and, such being the case, she would win him; she felt sure of it. Why had she been so hopeless, so despairing? There was no real cause for it. Perhaps, after all, he had looked upon the whole affair, not as a solemn engagement, but as a childish farce. Perhaps he had never really thought of her as his wife; but there would be an end to that thoughtlessness now. What had passed on the previous day would arouse his attention, he could never know the same indifference again.

So she rose with renewed hope. She shrank from the look of her face in the glass. "Cold water and fresh air," she said to herself, with a smile, "will soon remedy such paleness." And thus on that very day began for her the new life—the life in which, no longer sure of her love, she was to try to win it.

He would have loved her had he been able; but his own words were true—"Love is fate."

There was nothing in common between them—no sympathy—none of those mystical cords that, once touched, set two human hearts throbbing, and never rest until they are one. He could not have been fonder of her than he was, in a brotherly sense; but as for lover's love, from the first day he had seen her,

a beautiful, dark-eyed child, until the last he had never felt the least semblance of it.

It was a story of failure. She strove as perhaps woman never before had striven, and she succeeded in winning his truest admiration, his warmest friendship; he felt more at home with her than any one else in the wide world. But there it ended—she won no more.

It was not his fault; it was simply because the electric spark called love had never been and never could be elicited between his soul and hers. He would have done anything for her—he was her truest, best friend; but he was not her lover.

She hoped against hope. Each day she counted the kind words he had said to her; she noted every glance, every look, every expression. But she could not find that she made any progress—nothing that indicated any change from brotherly friendship to love. Still she hoped against hope, the chances are that she would have died of a broken heart.

Then the season ended. She went back to Verdun Royal with Lady Peters, and Lord Arleigh to Beechgrove. They wrote to each other at Christmas, and met at Calverley, the seat of Lord Rineham. She contrived, even when away from him, to fill his life. She was always consulting him on matters of interest to her; she sought his advice continually, and about everything, from the renewal of a lease to the making of a new acquaintance. "I cannot do wrong," she would say to him, "if I follow your advice." He was pleased and happy to be able to help the daughter of his mother's dearest friend.

Her manner completely deceived him. If she had evinced the least pique or discontent—if she had by word or look shown the least resentment—he would have suspected that she cared for him, and would have been on his guard. As it was, he would not have believed any one who had told him she loved him.

The explanation had been made; there was no longer even a shadow between them; they both understood that the weak, nonsensical tie was broken. That they were the dearest of friends, and quite happy, would have been Lord Arleigh's notion of matters. Philippa L'Estrange might have told a different story.

The proposed party at Beechgrove did not come off. There were some repairs needed in the eastern wing, and Lord Arleigh himself had so many engagements, that no time could be found for it; but when the season came round Philippa and he met again.

By this time some of Miss L'Estrange's admirers had come to the conclusion that there was no truth in the report of the engagement between herself and Lord Arleigh. Among these was his grace the Duke of Hazlewood. He loved the beautiful,

queenly girl who had so disdainfully refused his coronet—the very refusal had made him care more than ever for her. He was worldly-wise enough to know that there were few women in London who would have refused him; and he said to himself that, if she would not marry him, he would go unmarried to the grave. He was one of the first to feel sure that there was no truth in the rumors that had grieved him so the previous year. Miss L'Estrange and Lord Arleigh were by force of circumstances great friends—nothing more; and this season he determined to make a friend of the man he had detested as a rival.

When the Duke of Hazlewood made up his mind, he generally accomplished his desire; he sought Lord Arleigh with such assiduity, he made himself so pleasant and agreeable to him, that the master of Beechgrove soon showed him his most cordial and sincere liking. Then they became warm friends. The duke confided in Lord Arleigh—he told him the whole story of his love for Miss L'Estrange.

"I know," he said, "that no one has so much influence over her as you. I do not believe in the absurd stories told about an engagement between you, but I see plainly that she is your friend, and that you are hers; and I want you to use your influence with her in my favor."

Lord Arleigh promised to do so—and he intended to keep his promise; they were on such intimate and friendly terms that he could venture upon saying anything of that kind to her. She would not be displeased—on the contrary, she would like his advice; it might even be that before now she had wished to ask for it, but had not liked to do so—so completely did these two play at cross-purposes and misunderstand each other.

It was easier to say to himself that he would speak to her as the duke wished than to do it. He saw that any allusion to her lovers or admirers made her ill at ease—she did not like it; even his laughing comments on the homage paid to her did not please her.

"I do not like lovers," she said to him one day, "and I am tired of admirers—I prefer friends."

"But," he opposed, laughingly, "if all that wise men and philosphers tell us is correct, there are no true friends."

He never forgot the light that shone in her face as she raised it to his.

"I do not believe that," she returned; "there are true friends —you are one to me."

The tenderness of her manner struck him forcibly. Something kinder and softer stirred in his heart than had ever stirred before for her; he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"You are right, Philippa," he said. "If ever a woman had a true, stanch friend, I am and will be one to you."

From her heart to her lips rose the words: "Shall you never be more?" Perhaps even her eyes asked the question more eloquently than her lips could have done, for his face flushed, and she turned away with some slight embarrassment.

"I shall try and keep your friendship," she said; "but that will be easily done, Norman."

"Yes," he replied; "one of the traditions of our house is 'truth in friendship, trust in love, honor in war.' To be a true friend and a noble foe is characteristic of the Arleighs."

"I hope that you will never be a foe of mine," she rejoined, laughingly. And that evening, thinking over the events of the day she flattered herself that she had made some little progress after all.

CHAPTER XIII.

The opportunity that Lord Arleigh looked for came at last. Philippa had some reason to doubt the honesty of a man whom she had been employing as agent. She was kind of heart, and did not wish to punish him, yet she felt sure that he had not done his duty by her. To speak to her solicitors about it would be, she felt, injurious to him, whether innocent or guilty. If innocent, it would create a prejudice against him; if guilty, they would wish to punish him. She resolved upon laying the matter before Lord Arleigh, and seeing what he thought of it.

He listened very patiently, examined the affair, and then told her that he believed she had been robbed.

"What shall I do?" she asked, looking at him earnestly.

"I know what you ought to do, Philippa. You ought to punish him."

"But he has a wife, Norman, and innocent little children; in exposing him I shall punish them, and they are innocent."

"That is one of the strangest of universal laws to me," said Lord Arleigh—"why the innocent always do, and always must, suffer for the guilty; it is one of the mysteries I shall never understand. Common sense tells me that you ought to expose this man—that he ought to be punished for what he has done. Yet, if you do, his wife and children will be dragged down into an abyss of misery. Suppose you make a compromise of matters and lecture him well."

He was half smiling as he spoke, but she took every word in serious earnest.

"Philippa," he continued, "why do you not marry? A husband would save you all this trouble; he would attend to your affairs, and shield you from annoyances of this kind."

"The answer to your question, 'Why do I not marry?' would form a long story," she replied, and then she turned the conversation.

But he was determined to keep his word, and pleaded with her for the duke. Another opportunity came that evening. It was Lady Peters' birthday, and Philippa had invited some of her most intimate friends; not young people, but those with whom she thought her *chaperon* would enjoy herself best. The result was a very pleasant dinner-party, followed by a very pleasant evening. Lord Arleigh could not be absent, for it was, in some measure, a family *fête*.

The guests did not remain very late, and Lady Peters, professing herself tired with the exertions she had made, lay down on a couch, and was soon asleep. Philippa stood by the window, with the rose-silk hangings drawn.

"Come out on the balcony," she said to Lord Arleigh, "the room is very warm."

It was night, but the darkness was silver-gray, not black. The sky above was brilliant with the gleam of a thousand stars, the moon was shining behind some silvery clouds, the great masses of foliage in the park were just stirred with the whisper of the night, and sweetest odors came from heliotrope and mignonnette; the brooding silence of the summer night lay over the land.

Philippa sat down, and Lord Arleigh stood by her side.

The moonlight falling on her beautiful face softened it into wondrous loveliness—it was pale, refined, with depths of passion in the dark eyes, and tender, tremulous smiles on the scarlet lips. She wore some material of white and gold. A thin scarf was thrown carelessly over her white shoulders. When the wind stirred it blew the scarf against her face.

She might have been the very goddess of love, she looked so fair out in the starlight. If there had been one particle of love in Lord Arleigh's heart, that hour and scene must have called it into life. For a time they sat in perfect silence. Her head was thrown back against a pillar round which red roses clustered and clung, and the light of the stars fell full upon her face; the dark eyes were full of radiance.

"How beautiful it is, Norman," she said, suddenly. "What music has ever equaled the whispers of the night-wind? It seems a sad pity after all that we are obliged to lead such conventional lives, and spend the greater part of them in warm, close rooms."

"You have a great love for out-of-door freedom," he remarked, laughingly.

"Yes, I love the fresh air. I think if any one asked me what I loved best on earth, I should say wind. I love it in all its

moods—rough, caressing, tender, impetuous, calm, stormy. It is always beautiful. Listen to it now, just sighing in the branches of those tall trees. Could any music be sweeter or softer?"

"No," he replied, and then added, "The time and the scene embolden me, Philippa; there is something that I wish to say to you—something that I long have wished to say. Will you hear it now?"

A tremor like that of the leaves in the wind seemed to pass over her. There was a startled expression in the dark eyes, a quiver of the crimson lips. Was it coming at last—this for which she had longed all her life? She controlled all outward signs of emotion and turned to him quite calmly.

"I am always ready to listen to you, Norman, and to hear what you have to say."

"You see, Philippa, the starlight makes me bold. If we were in that brilliantly-lighted drawing-room of yours, I should probably hesitate long before speaking plainly, as I am going to do now."

He saw her clasp her hands tightly, but he had no key to what was passing in her mind. He drew nearer to her.

"You know, Philippa," he began, "that I have always been fond of you. I have always taken the same interest in you that I should have taken in a dearly-beloved sister of my own, if Heaven had given me one."

She murmured some few words which he did not hear.

"I am going to speak to you now," he continued, "just as though you were my own sister, have I your permission to do so, Philippa?"

"Yes," she replied.

"And you promise not to be angry about anything that I may say?"

"I could never be angry with you, Norman," she answered.

"Then I want you to tell me why you will not marry the Duke of Hazlewood. You have treated me as your brother and your friend. The question might seem impertinent from another; from me it will not appear impertinent, not curious—simply true and kindly interest. Why will you not marry him, Philippa?"

A quick sharp spasm of pain passed over her face. She was silent for a minute before she answered him, and then she said:

"The reason is very simple, Norman—because I do not love him."

"That is certainly a strong reason; but, Philippa, let me ask you now another question—why do you not love him?"

She could have retorted, "Why do you not love me?" but prudence forbade it.

"I cannot tell you. I have heard you say that love is fate. I should imagine it must be because the Duke of Hazlewood is not my fate."

He did not know what answer to make to that, it was so entirely his own way of thinking.

"But, Philippa," he resumed after a pause, "do you not think that you might love him if you tried?"

"I have never thought about it," was the quiet reply.

Lord Arleigh continued:

"In my idea he is one of the most charming men in England; I have never seen a more perfect type of what an English gentleman should be—he is noble, generous, brave, chivalrous. What fault do you find with him, Philippa?"

"I?" she asked, looking up at him in wonder. "My dear Norman, I have never found fault with the duke in my life."

"Then why can you not love him?"

"That is a very different thing. I find no fault with him; on the contrary, I agree with you that he is one of the noblest of men, yet I have never thought of marrying him."

"But, Philippa"—and with kindly impressiveness he laid one hand on her shoulder—"why do you not think of marrying him? Between you and myself there can be no compliments, no flattery. I tell you that of all the women in England you are the most fitted to be the Duchess of Hazlewood—and you would be a beautiful duchess, too. Think of the position you would occupy—second only to royalty. I should like to see you in such a position—you would fill it grandly. Think of the power, the influence, the enormous amount of good you could do; think of it all, Philippa?"

He did not see the sudden, sharp quiver of pain that passed over the beautiful face, nor how pale it grew in the starlight.

"I am thinking," she answered, quietly—"I am listening attentively to all that you say."

She drew the light scarf more closely around her shoulders, and shuddered as though a chill breeze had passed over her.

"Are you cold, dear?" he asked kindly.

"Cold! How could I be on this warm starlit night? Go on, Norman; let me hear all that you have to say."

"I am trying to persuade you to accept what seems to me one of the happiest lots ever offered to woman. I want to see you the Duke of Hazlewood's wife. I cannot imagine any man more calculated to win a woman's love, or to please her fancy, than he is. He is young, handsome, noble in face and figure as he is in heart and soul; and he is clever and gifted."

"Yes," she allowed, slowly, "he is all that, Norman."

"Some day or other he will be the leading spirit in the land; he will be the head of a great party."

"That I believe," she agreed.

"And he loves you so well, Philippa; I have never seen a man more devoted. How many years has he loved you now—two or three? And he tells me that he shall go unmarried to the grave unless you consent to be his wife."

"Did he tell you that? He must indeed be attached to me," she observed. "Norman, did he ask you to say all this to me?"

"He asked me to plead his cause," replied Lord Arleigh.

"Why did he ask you to do so?"

"Because—believing us to be what we really are, Philippa, tried and true friends—he thought I should have some influence over you."

"Clever duke!" she said. "Norman, are you well versed in modern poetry?"

He looked up in blank surprise at the question—it was so totally unexpected.

"In modern poetry?" he repeated. "Yes, I think I am. Why, Philippa?"

"I will tell you why," she said, turning her beautiful face to him. "If you will be patient, I will tell you why."

She was silent for a few minutes, and then Lord Arleigh said:

"I am patient enough, Philippa; will you tell me why?"

The dark eyes raised to his had in them a strange light—a strange depth of passion.

"I want to know if you remember the beautiful story of Priscilla, the Puritan maiden," she said, in a tremulous voice—"Priscilla, the loveliest maiden of Plymouth?"

"You mean the story of Miles Standish," he corrected. "Yes, I remember it, Philippa."

"That which a Puritan maiden could do, and all posterity sing her praises for, surely I—a woman of the world—may do without blame. Do you remember, Norman, when John Alden goes to her to do the wooing which the stanch soldier does not do for himself—do you remember her answer? Let me give you the verse—

"'But, as he warmed and glowed in his simple and eloquent language,
Quite forgetful of self, and full of the praise of his rival,
Archly the maiden smiled, and with eyes overrunning with laughter,
Said in a tremulous voice, "Why don't you speak for yourself,
John?"'"

The sweet musical voice died away in the starlight, the wind stirred the crimson roses—silence, solemn and deep, fell over Lord Arleigh and his companion. Philippa broke it.

"Surely you, in common with all of us, admire the Puritan maiden, Norman?"

"Yes, I do admire her," he answered; "she is one of my favorite heroines."

"So she is of mine; and I love her the more for the womanly outburst of honest truth that triumphed over all conventionality. Norman, what she, the 'loveliest maiden in Plymouth,' the beloved of Miles Standish, said to John Alden, I say to you—'Why don't you speak for yourself?'"

There was infinite tenderness in his face as he bent over her—infinite pain in his voice as he spoke to her.

"John Alden loved Priscilla," he said, slowly—"she was the one woman in all the world for him—his ideal—his fate, but I—oh, Philippa, how I hate myself because I cannot answer you differently! You are my friend, my sister, but not the woman I must love as my wife."

"When you urged me a few minutes since to marry your friend, you asked me why I could not love him, seeing that he had all lovable qualities. Norman, why can you not love me?"

"I can answer you only in the some words—I do not know. I love you with as true an affection as ever man gave to woman; but I have not for you a lover's love. I cannot tell why, for you are one of the fairest of fair women."

"Fair, but not your 'ideal woman,'" she said, gently.

"No, not my 'ideal woman,'" he returned; "my sister, my friend—not my love."

"I am to blame," she said, proudly; "but again I must plead that I am like Priscilla. While you are pleading the cause of another, the truth came uppermost; you must forgive me for speaking so forcibly. As the poem says:

> "'There are moments in life when the heart is so full of emotions
> That if, by chance, it be shaken, or into its depths, like a pebble,
> Drops some careless word, it overflows, and its secret,
> Spilt on the ground like water, can never be gathered together.'"

"My dearest Philippa, you have not been to blame," he said; "you judge yourself so hardly always."

"It is the fate of a woman to be silent," she said again. "Still, I am glad that I have spoken. Norman, will you tell me what your ideal of woman is like, that I may know her when I see her?"

"Nay," he objected, gently, "let us talk of something else."

But she persisted.

"Tell me," she urged, "that I may know in what she differs from me."

"I do not know that I can tell you," he replied. "I have not thought much of the matter."

"But if any one asked you to describe your ideal of what a woman should be, you could do it," she pursued.

"Perhaps so, but at best it would be but an imperfect sketch. She must be young, fair, gentle, pure, tender of heart, noble in soul, with a kind of shy, sweet grace; frank, yet not outspoken; free from all affectation, yet with nothing unwomanly; a mixture of child and woman. If I love an ideal, it is something like that."

"And she must be fair, like all the ladies Arleigh, with eyes like the hyacinth, and hair tinged with gold, I suppose, Norman?"

"Yes; I saw a picture once in Rome that realized my notion of true womanly loveliness. It was a very fair face, with something of the innocent wonder of a child mixed with the dawning love and passion of noblest womanhood."

"You admire an *ingénue*. We have both our tastes; mine, if I were a man, would incline more to the brilliant and handsome."

She would have added more, but at that moment Lady Peters drew aside the silken hanging.

"My dear children," she said, "I should ill play my part of chaperon if I did not remind you of the hour. We have been celebrating my birthday, but my birthday is past and gone—it is after midnight."

Lord Arleigh looked up in wonder.

"After midnight? Impossible! Yet I declare my watch proves that it is. It is all the fault of the starlight, Lady Peters; you must blame that."

Lady Peters went out to them.

"I do not wonder at your lingering here," she said. "How calm and sweet the night is! It reminds me of the night in 'Romeo and Juliet.' It was on such a night *Jessica*——"

Philippa held up her hands in horror.

"No more poetry to-night, dear Lady Peters; we have had more than enough."

"Is that true, Lord Arleigh? Have you really had more than enough?"

"I have not found it so," he replied. "However, I must go. I wish time would sometimes stand still; all pleasant hours end so soon. Good-night, Lady Peters."

But that most discreet of *chaperons* had already re-entered the drawing-room—it was no part of her business to be present when the two friends said good-night.

"Good-night, Philippa," he said, in a low, gentle voice, bending over her.

The wind stirred her perfumed hair until it touched his cheek, the leaves of the crimson roses fell in a shower around her. She

raised her beautiful pale face to his—the unspeakable love, the yearning sorrow on it, moved him greatly. He bent down and touched her brow with his lips.

"Good-night, Philippa, my sister—my friend," he said.

Even by the faint starlight he saw a change pass over her face.

"Good-night," she responded. "I have more to say to you, but Lady Peters will be horrified if you remain any longer. You will call to-morrow, and then I can finish my conversation?"

"I will come," he replied, gravely.

He waited a moment to see if she would pass into the drawing-room before him, but she turned away and leaned her arms on the stone balustrade.

It was nearly half an hour afterward when Lady Peters once more drew aside the hangings.

"Philippa," she said, gently, "you will take cold out there."

She wondered why the girl paused some few minutes before answering; then Miss L'Estrange said, in a low, calm voice:

"Do not wait for me, Lady Peters; I am thinking and do not wish to be interrupted."

But Lady Peters did not seem quite satisfied.

"I do not like to leave you sitting there," she said, "the servants will think it strange."

"Their thoughts do not concern me," she returned, haughtily. "Good-night, Lady Peters; do not interrupt me again, if you please."

And the good-tempered *chaperon* went away, thinking to herself that perhaps she had done wrong in interrupting the *tete-a-tete.*

"Still I did it for the best," she said to herself; "and servants will talk."

Philippa L'Estrange did not move. Lady Peters thought she spoke in a calm, proud voice. She would have been surprised could she have seen the beautiful face all wet with tears; for Philippa had laid her head on the cold stone, and was weeping such tears as women weep but once in life. She sat there not striving to subdue the tempest of emotion that shook her, giving full vent to her passion of grief, stretching out her hands and crying to her lost love.

It was all over now. She had stepped down from the proud height of her glorious womanhood to ask for his love, and he had told her that he had none to give her. She had thrown aside her pride, her delicacy. She had let him read the guarded secret of her heart, only to hear his reply—that she was not his ideal of womanhood. She had asked for bread—he had given her a stone. She had lavished her love at his feet—he

had coolly stepped aside. She had lowered her pride, humiliated herself, all in vain.

"No woman," she said to herself, "would ever pardon such a slight or forgive such a wrong."

At first she wept as though her heart would break—tears fell like rain from her eyes, tears that seemed to burn as they fell; then after a time pride rose and gained the ascendancy. She, the courted, beautiful woman, to be so humiliated, so slighted! She, for whose smile the noblest in the land asked in vain, to have her almost offered love so coldly refused! She, the very queen of love and beauty, to be so spurned!

When the passion of grief had subsided, when the hot angry glow of wounded pride died away, she raised her face to the night-skies.

"I swear," she said, "that I will be revenged--that I will take such vengeance on him as will bring his pride down far lower than he has brought mine. I will never forgive him. I have loved him with a devotion passing the love of woman. I will hate more than I have loved him. I would have given my life to make him happy. I now consecrate it to vengeance. I swear to take such revenge on him as shall bring the name of Arleigh low indeed."

And that vow she intended to keep.

"If ever I forget what has passed here," she said to herself, "may Heaven forget me!"

To her servants she had never seemed colder or haughtier than on this night, when she kept them waiting while she registered her vow.

What shape was her vengeance to take?

"I shall find out," she thought; "it will come in time."

CHAPTER XIV.

Miss L'Estrange was standing alone in the small conservatory on the morning following her eventful conversation with Lord Arleigh, when the latter was announced. How she had passed the hours of the previous night was known only to herself. As the world looks the fairer and fresher for the passing of a heavy storm, the sky more blue, the color of flowers and trees brighter, so she on this morning, after those long hours of agony, looked more beautiful than ever. Her white morning dress, made of choice Indian muslin, was relieved by faint touches of pink; fine white lace encircled her throat and delicate wrists.

Tall and slender, she stood before a large plant with scarlet blossoms when he came in.

Lord Arleigh looked as he felt—ill at ease. He had not slept through thinking of the conversation in the balcony—it had made him profoundly wretched. He would have given much not to renew it; but she had asked him to come, and he had promised.

Would she receive him with tears and reproaches? Would she cry out that he was cold and cruel? Would she torture himself and herself by trying to find out why he did not love her? Or would she be sad, cold, and indifferent?

His relief was great when she raised a laughing, radiant face to his and held out her hand in greeting.

"Good-morning, Norman," she said, in a pleasant voice. "Now confess that I am a clever actress, and that I have given you a real fright."

He looked at her in wonder.

"I do not understand you," he returned.

"It is so easy to mislead a man," she said, laughingly.

"I do not understand, Philippa," he repeated.

"Did you really take all my pretty balcony scene in earnest last night?" she asked.

"I did indeed," he replied; and again the clear musical laugh seemed to astonish him.

"I could not have believed it, Norman," she said. "Did you really think I was in earnest?"

"Certainly I did. Were you not?"

"No," she answered.

"Then I thank Heaven for it," he said, "for I have been very unhappy about you. Why did you say so much if you did not mean it, Philippa?"

"Because you annoyed me by pleading the cause of the duke. He had no right to ask you to do such a thing, and you were unwise to essay such a task. I have punished you by mystifying you—I shall next punish him."

"Then you did not mean all that you said?" he interrogated, still wondering at this unexpected turn of events.

"I should have given you credit for more penetration, Norman," she replied. "I to mean such nonsense—I to avow a preference for any man! Can you have been so foolish as to think so? It was only a charade, acted for your amusement."

"Oh, Philippa," he cried, "I am so pleased, dear! And yet—yet, do you know, I wish that you had not done it. It has given me a shock. I shall never be quite sure whether you are jesting or serious. I shall never feel that I really understand you."

"You will, Norman. It did seem so ridiculous for you, my

old playfellow, to sit lecturing me so gravely about matrimony. You took it so entirely for granted that I did not care for the duke."

"And do you care for him, Philippa?" he asked.

"Can you doubt it, after the description you gave of him, Norman?"

"You are mocking me again, Philippa," he said.

"But you were very eloquent, Norman," she persisted. "I have never heard any one more so. You painted his Grace of Hazlewood in such glowing colors that no one could help falling in love with him."

"Did I? Well, I do think highly of him, Philippa. And so, after all, you really care for him?"

"I do not think I shall tell you, Norman. You deserve to be kept in the dark. Would you tell me if you found your ideal woman?"

"I would. I would tell you at once," he replied, eagerly.

"If you could but have seen your face!" she cried. "I feel tempted to act the charade over again. Why, Norman, what likeness can you see between Philippa L'Estrange, the proud, cold woman of the world, and that sweet little Puritan maiden at her spinning wheel?"

"I should never have detected any likeness unless you yourself had first pointed it out," he said. "Tell me, Philippa, are you really going to make the duke happy at last?"

"It may be that I am going to make him profoundly miserable. As punishment for your lecture, I shall refuse to tell you anything about it," she replied; and then she added: "You will ride with me this morning, Norman?"

"Yes, I will ride with you, Philippa. I cannot tell you how thankful and relieved I am."

"To find that you have not made quite so many conquests as you thought," she said. "It was a sorry jest to play after all; but you provoked me to it, Norman. I want you to make me a promise."

"That I will gladly do," he replied. Indeed he was so relieved, so pleased, so thankful to be freed from the load of self-reproach, that he would have promised anything.

Her face grew earnest. She held out her hand to him.

"Promise me this, Norman," she said—"that, whether I remain Philippa L'Estrange or become Duchess of Hazlewood—no matter what I am, or may be—you will always be the same to me as you are now—my brother, my truest, dearest, best friend. Promise me."

"I do promise, Philippa, with all my heart," he responded. "And I will never break my promise."

"If I marry, you will come to see me—you will trust in me—

you will be just what you are now—you will make my house your home, as you do this?"

"Yes—that is, if your husband consents," replied Lord Arleigh.

"Rely upon it, my husband—if I ever have one—will not dispute my wishes," she said. "I am not the model woman you dream of. She, of course, will be submissive in everything; I intend to have my own way."

"We are friends for life, Philippa," he declared; "and I do not think that any one who really understands me will ever cavil at our friendship."

"Then, that being settled, we will go at once for our ride. How those who know me best would laugh, Norman, if they heard of the incident of the Puritan maiden! If I go to another fancy ball this season, I shall go as *Priscilla* of Plymouth, and you had better go as *John Alden*."

He held up his hands imploringly.

"Do not tease me about it any more, Philippa," he remarked. "I cannot quite tell why, but you make me feel both insignificant and vain; yet nothing would have been further from my mind than the ideas you have filled it with."

"Own you were mistaken, and then I will be generous and forgive you," she said, laughingly.

"I was mistaken—cruelly so—weakly so—happily so," he replied. "Now you will be generous and spare me."

He did not see the bitter smile with which she turned away, nor the pallor that crept even to her lips. Once again in his life Lord Arleigh was completely deceived.

A week afterward he received a note in Philippa's handwriting; it said, simply:

"DEAR NORMAN: You were good enough to plead the duke's cause. When you meet him next, ask him if he has anything to tell you. PHILIPPA L'ESTRANGE."

What the Duke of Hazlewood had to tell was that Miss L'Estrange had promised to be his wife, and that the marriage was to take place in August. He prayed Lord Arleigh to be present as his "best man" on the occasion.

On the same evening Lady Peters and Miss L'Estrange sat in the drawing-room at Verdun House, alone. Philippa had been very restless. She had been walking to and fro; she had opened her piano and closed it; she had taken up volume after volume and laid it down again, when suddenly her eyes fell on a book prettily bound in crimson and gold, which Lady Peters had been reading.

"What book is that?" she asked, suddenly.

"Lord Lytton's 'Lady of Lyons,'" replied Lady Peters.

Philippa raised it, looked through it, and then, with a strange smile and a deep sigh, laid it down.

"At last," she said—"I have found it at last!"

"Found what, my dear?" asked Lady Peters, looking up.

"Something I have been searching for," replied Philippa, as she quitted the room, still with the strange smile on her lips.

CHAPTER XV.

The great event of the year succeeding was the appearance of the Duchess of Hazlewood. Miss L'Estrange the belle and the heiress, had been very popular; her Grace of Hazlewood was more popular still. She was queen of fashionable London. At her mansion all the most exclusive met. She had resolved upon giving her life to society, upon cultivating it, upon making herself its mistress and queen. She succeeded. She became essentially a leader of society. To belong to the Duchess of Hazlewood's "set" was to be the *créme de la créme.* The beautiful young duchess had made up her mind upon two things. The first was that she would be a queen of society; the second, that she would reign over such a circle as had never been gathered together before. She would have youth, beauty, wit, genius; she would not trouble about wealth. She would admit no one who was not famous for some qualification or other—some grace of body or mind—some talent or great gift. The house should be open to talent of all kinds, but never open to anything commonplace. She would be the encourager of genius, the patroness of the fine arts, the friend of all talent.

It was a splendid career that she marked out for herself, and she was the one woman in England especially adapted for it. The only objection to it was that while she gave every scope to imagination—while she provided for all intellectual wants and needs—she made no allowance for the affections; they never entered into her calculations.

In a few weeks half London was talking about the beautiful Duchess of Hazlewood. In all the "Fashionable Intelligence" of the day she had a long paragraph to herself. The duchess had given a ball, had had a grand *réunion*, a *soirée*, a garden-party; the duchess had been at such an entertainment; when a long description of her dress or costume would follow. Nor was it only among the upper ten thousand that she was so pre-eminently popular. If a bazar, a fancy fair, a ball, were needed to aid some charitable cause, she was always chosen as

patroness; her vote, her interest, one word from her, was all-sufficient.

Her wedding had been a scene of the most gorgeous magnificence. She had been married from her house at Verdun Royal, and half the county had been present at what was certainly the most magnificent ceremonial of the year. The leading journal, the *Illustrated Intelligence*, produced a supplement on the occasion, which was very much admired. The duke gave the celebrated artist, M. Delorme, a commission to paint the interior of the church at Verdun Royal as it appeared while the ceremony was proceeding. That picture forms the chief ornament now of the grand gallery at the Court.

The wedding presents were something wonderful to behold; it was considered that the duchess had one of the largest fortunes in England in jewels alone. The wedding-day was the fourth of August, and it had seemed as though nature herself had done her utmost to make the day most brilliant.

It was not often that so beautiful a bride was seen as the young duchess. She bore her part in the scene very bravely. The papers told how Lord Arleigh was "best man" on the occasion; but no one guessed even ever so faintly of the tragedy that came that morning to a crisis. The happy pair went off to Vere Court, the duke's favorite residence, and there for a short time the public lost sight of them.

If the duke had been asked to continue the history of his wedding-day, he would have told a strange story—how, when they were in the railway-carriage together, he had turned to his beautiful young wife with some loving words on his lips, and she had cried out that she wanted air, to let no one come near her—that she had stretched out her hands wildly, as though beating off something terrible.

He believed that she was overcome by excitement or the heat of the day; he soothed her as he would have soothed a child; and when they reached Vere Court he insisted that they should rest. She did so. Her dark hair fell round her white neck and shoulders, her beautiful face was flushed, the scarlet lips trembled as though she were a grieving child; and the young duke stood watching her, thinking how fair she was and what a treasure he had won. Then he heard her murmur some words in her sleep—what were they? He could not quite distinguish them; it was something about a Puritan maiden *Priscilla* and *John*—he could not catch the name—something that did not concern him, and in which he had no part. Suddenly she held out her arms, and, in a voice he never forgot, cried, "Oh, my love, my love!" That of course meant himself. Down on his knees by her side went the young duke—he covered her hands with kisses.

"My darling," he said, "you are better now. I have been alarmed about you, Philippa; I feared that you were ill. My darling, give me a word and a smile."

She had quite recovered herself then; she remembered that she was Duchess of Hazlewood—wife of the generous nobleman who was at her side. She was mistress of herself in a moment.

"Have I alarmed you?" she said. "I did feel ill; but I am better now—quite well, in fact."

She said to herself that she had her new life to begin, and the sooner she began it the better; so she made herself very charming to the young duke, and he was in ecstasies over the prize he had won.

Thenceforwarward they lived happily enough. If the young duke found his wife less loving, less tender of heart, than he had believed her to be, he had no complaint.

"She is so beautiful and gifted," he would say to himself. "I cannot expect everything. I know that she loves me, although she does not say much about it. I know that I can trust her in all things, even though she makes no protestations."

They fell into the general routine of life. One loved—the other allowed herself to be loved. The duke adored his wife, and she accepted his adoration.

They were never spoken of as a model couple, although every one agreed that it was an excellent match—that they were very happy. The duke looked up with wondering admiration to the beautiful stately lady who bore his name. She could not do wrong in his eyes, everything she said was right, all she did was perfect. He never dreamed of opposing her wishes. There was no lady in England so completely her own mistress, so completely mistress of every one and everything around her, as her Grace of Hazlewood.

When the season came around again, and the brilliant life which she had laid out for herself was hers, she might have been the happiest of women but for the cloud which darkened her whole existence. Lord Arleigh had kept his promise—he had been her true friend, with her husband's full permission. The duke was too noble and generous himself to feel any such ignoble passion as jealousy—he was far too confiding. To be jealous of his wife would never have entered his mind; nor was there the least occasion for it. If Lord Arleigh had been her own brother, their relationship could not have been of a more blameless kind; even the censorious world of fashion, so quick to detect a scandal, so merciless in its enjoyment of one, never presumed to cast an aspersion on this friendship. There was something so frank, so open about it, that blame was an impossibility. If the duke was busy or engaged when his wife wanted

to ride or drive, he asked her cousin Lord Arleigh to take his place, as he would have asked his own brother. If the duke could not attend opera or ball, Lord Arleigh was at hand. He often said it was a matter of perplexity to him which was his own home—whether he liked Beechgrove, Verdun Royal or Vere Court best.

"No one was ever so happy, so blessed with true friends as I am," he would say; at which speech the young duchess would smile that strange fathomless smile so few understood.

If they went to Vere Court, Lord Arleigh was generally asked to go with them; the Duke really liked him—a great deal for his own sake, more still for the sake of his wife. He could understand the childish friendship having grown with their growth; and he was too noble to expect anything less than perfect sincerity and truth.

The duchess kept her word. She made no further allusion to the Puritan maiden—that little episode had, so it appeared, completely escaped her memory. There was one thing to be noticed—she often read the "Lady of Lyons," and appeared to delight in it. When she had looked through a few pages, she would close the book with a sigh and a strange, brooding smile. At times, too, she would tease Lord Arleigh about his ideal woman; but that was always in her husband's presence.

"You have not found the ideal woman yet, Norman?" she would ask him, laughingly; and he would answer. "No, not yet."

Then the duke would wax eloquent, and tell him that he really knew little of life—that if he wanted to be happy he must look for a wife.

"You were easily contented," the duchess would say. "Norman wants an ideal. You were content with a mere mortal—he will never be."

"Then find him an ideal, Philippa," would be the duke's reply. "You know some of the nicest girls in London; find him an ideal among them."

Then to the beautiful face would come the strange, brooding smile.

"Give me time," would her Grace of Hazlewood say; "I shall find just what I want for him—in time."

CHAPTER XVI.

It was a beautiful, pure morning. For many years there had not been so brilliant a season in London; every one seemed to be enjoying it; ball succeeded ball; *fete* succeeded *fete*. Lord Arleigh had received a note from the Duchess of Hazlewood,

asking him if he would call before noon, as she wished to see him.

He went at once to Verdun House, and was told that the duchess was engaged, but would see him in a few minutes. Contrary to the usual custom, he was shown into a pretty morning-room, one exclusively used by the duchess—a small, octagonal room, daintily furnished, which opened on to a small rose-garden, also exclusively kept for the use of the duchess. Into this garden neither friend nor visitor ever ventured; it was filled with rose-trees, a little fountain played in the midst, and a small trellised arbor was at one side. Why had he been shown into the duchess' private room? He had often heard the duke tease his wife about her room, and say that no one was privileged to enter it; why, then, was such a privilege accorded him?

He smiled to himself, thinking that in all probability it was some mistake of the servants; he pictured to himself the expression of Philippa's face when she should find him there. He looked round; the room bore traces of her presence—around him were some of her favorite flowers and books.

He went to the long French window, wondering at the rich collection of roses, and there he saw a picture that never forsook his memory again—there he met his fate—saw the ideal woman of his dreams at last. He had treated all notions of love in a very off-hand, cavalier kind of manner; he had contented himself with his own favorite axiom—"Love is fate;" if ever it was to come to him it would come, and there would be an end of it. He had determined on one thing—this same love should be his slave, his servant, never his master; but, as he stood looking out, he was compelled to own his kingship was over.

Standing there, his heart throbbing as it had never done before, every nerve thrilling, his face flushed, a strange, unknown sensation filling him with vague, sweet wonder, Lord Arleigh met his fate.

This was the picture he saw—a beautiful but by no means a common one. In the trellised arbor, which contained a stand and one or two chairs, was a young girl of tall, slender figure, with a fair, sweet face, inexpressibly lovely, lilies and roses exquisitely blended—eyes like blue hyacinths, large, bright, and starlight, with white lids and dark long lashes, so dark that they gave a peculiar expression to the eyes—one of beauty, thought, and originality. The lips were sweet and sensitive, beautiful when smiling, but even more beautiful in repose. The oval contour of the face was perfect; from the white brow, where the veins were so clearly marked, rose a crown of golden hair, not brown or auburn, but of pure pale gold—a dower of beauty in itself.

The expression of the face was one of shy virgin beauty. One

could imagine meeting it in the dim aisles of some cathedral, near the shrine of a saint, as an angel or a Madonna; one could imagine it bending over a sick child, lighting with its pure loveliness the home of sorrow; but one could never picture it in a ball-room. It was a face of girlish, saintly purity, of fairest loveliness—a face where innocence, poetry, and passion all seemed to blend in one grand harmony. There was nothing commonplace about it. One could not mistake it for a plebeian face; "patrician" was written on every feature.

Lord Arleigh looked at her like one in a dream.

"If she had an aureole round her head, I should take her for an angel," he thought to himself, and stood watching her.

The same secret subtle harmony prevaded every action; each new attitude seemed to be the one that suited her best. If she raised her arms, she looked like a statue. Her hands were white and delicate, as though carved in ivory. He judged her to be about eighteen. But who was she, and what had brought her there? He could have stood through the long hours of the sunny day watching her, so completely had she charmed him, fascinated his very senses.

"Love is fate!" How often had he said that to himself, smiling the while? Now here his fate had come to him all unexpectedly—this most fair face had found its way to the very depths of his heart and nestled there.

He could not have been standing there long, yet it seemed to him that long hours parted him from the life he had known before. Presently he reproached himself for his folly. What had taken place? He had seen a fair face, that was all—a face that embodied his dream of loveliness. He had realized his ideal, he had suddenly, and without thinking of it, found his fate—the figure, the beauty that he had dreamed of all his life.

Nothing more than that; yet the whole world seemed changed. There was a brighter light in the blue skies, a new beauty had fallen on the flowers; in his heart was strange, sweet music; everything was idealized—glorified. Why? Because he had seen the face that had always filled his thoughts.

It seemed to him that he had been there long hours, when the door suddenly opened, and her Grace of Hazlewood entered.

"Norman," she said, as though in sudden wonder, "why did they show you in here?"

"I knew they were doing wrong," he replied. "This is your own special sanctum, Philippa?"

"Yes, it is indeed; still, as you are here, you may stay. I want to speak to you about that Richmond dinner. My husband does not seem to care about it. Shall we give it up?"

They talked for a few minutes about it, and then the duchess said, suddenly:

"What do you think about my roses, Norman?"

"They are wonderful," he replied, and then, in a low voice, he asked, "Philippa, who is that beautiful girl out there among your flowers?"

She did not smile, but a sudden light came into her eyes.

"It would be a great kindness not to tell you," she answered. "You see what comes of trespassing in forbidden places. I did not intend you to see that young lady."

"Why not?" he asked, abruptly.

"The answer to your question would be superfluous," she replied.

"But, Philippa, tell me at least who she is."

"That I cannot do," she replied, and then the magnificent face was lighted with a smile. "Is she your ideal woman, Norman?" she asked.

"My dear Philippa," he answered, gravely, "she is the ideal woman herself—neither more nor less."

"Found at last!" laughed the duchess. "For all that, Norman, you must not look at her."

"Why not? Is she married—engaged?"

"Married? That girl! Why, she has only just left school. If you really wish to know who she is I will tell you; but you must give me your word not to mention it."

"I promise," he replied.

He wondered why the beautiful face grew crimson and the dark eyes drooped.

"She is a poor relative of ours," said the duchess, "poor, you understand—nothing else."

"Then she is related to the duke?" he interrogated.

"Yes, distantly; and, after a fashion, we have adopted her. When she marries we shall give her a suitable dot. Her mother married unfortunately."

"Still, she was married?" said Lord Arleigh.

"Yes, certainly; but unhappily married. Her daughter, however, has received a good education, and now she will remain with us. But, Norman, in this I may trust you, as in everything else?"

"You my trust me implicitly," he replied.

"The duke did not quite like the idea of having her to live with us at first—and I do not wish it to be mentioned to him. If he speaks of it to you at all, it will be as my caprice. Let it pass—do not ask any questions about her; it only annoys her—it only annoys him. She is very happy with me. You see," see continued, "women can keep a secret. She has been here three weeks, yet you have never seen her before, and now it is by accident."

"But," said Norman, "what do you intend to do with her?"

The duchess took a seat near him, and assumed quite a confidential air.

"I have been for some time looking out for a companion," she said; "Lady Peters really must live at Verdun Royal—a housekeeper is not sufficient for that large establishment—it requires more than that. She has consented to make it her home, and I must have some one to be with me."

"You have the duke," he put in, wonderingly.

"True, and a husband must, perforce, be all that is adorable; still, having been accustomed to a lady-companion, I prefer keeping one; and this girl, so beautiful, so pure, so simple, is all that I need, or could wish for."

"So I should imagine," he replied. "Will you introduce her into society, Philippa?"

"I think not; she is a simple child, yet wonderfully clever. No, society shall not have her. I will keep her for my own."

"What is her name?" asked Lord Arleigh.

The duchess laughed.

"Ah, now, man-like, you are growing curious! I shall not tell you. Yes, I will; it is the name above all others for an ideal —Madaline."

"Madaline," he repeated; "it is very musical—Madaline."

"It suits her," said the duchess; "and now, Norman, I must go. I have some pressing engagements to-day."

"You will not introduce me then, Philippa?"

"No—why should I? You would only disturb the child's dream."

CHAPTER XVII.

Lord Arleigh could not rest for thinking of the vision he had seen; the face of the duchess' companion haunted him as no other face had ever done. He tried hard to forget it, saying to himself that it was a fancy, a foolish imagination, a day-dream; he tried to believe that in a few days he should have forgotten it.

It was quite otherwise. He left Vere House in a fever of unrest; he went everywhere he could think of to distract his thoughts. But the fair face with its sweet, maidenly expression, the tender blue eyes with their rich poetic depths, the sweet, sensitive lips were ever present. Look where he would he saw them. He went to the opera, and they seemed to smile at him from the stage; he walked home in the starlight—they were smiling at him from the stars; he tried to sleep—they haunted him; none had followed him as those eyes did.

"I think my heart and brain are on fire," he said to himself. "I will go and look once again at the fair young face; perhaps if she smiles at me or speaks to me I shall be cured."

He went; it was noon when he reached the Duke of Hazlewood's mansion. He inquired for the duchess, and was told she had gone to Hampton Court. He repeated the words in surprise.

"Hampton Court!" he said. "Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, my lord," was the footman's reply. "Her grace has gone there, for I heard her talking about the pictures this morning."

He could hardly imagine the duchess at Hampton Court. He felt half inclined to follow, and then he thought that perhaps it would be an intrusion; if she had wanted his society, she would certainly have asked for it. No, he would not go. He stood for a few minutes irresolute, wondering if he could ask whether the duchess had taken her young companion with her, and then he remembered that he did not even know her name.

How was the day to pass? Matters were worse than ever. If he had seen her, if he could have spoken to her, he might perhaps have felt better; as it was, the fever of unrest had deepened.

He was to meet the duchess that evening at the French Embassy; he would tell her she must relax some of her rigor in his favor. She was talking to the ambassador when he entered, but with a smiling gesture she invited him to her side.

"I hear that you called to-day," she said. "I had quite forgotten to tell you that we were going to Hampton Court."

"I could hardly believe it," he replied. "What took you there?"

"You will wonder when I tell you, Norman," she replied, laughingly. "I have always thought that I have a great capacity for spoiling people. My fair Madaline, as I have told you, is both poet and artist. She begged so hard to see the pictures at Hampton Court that I could not refuse her."

"I should not think the history of the belles of the court of Charles II. would be very useful to her," he said; and she was quick to detect the jealousy in his voice.

"Norman, you are half inclined to be cross, I believe, because I did not ask you to go with us."

"I should have enjoyed it, Philippa, very much."

"It would not have been prudent," she observed, looking most bewitchingly beautiful in her effort to look matronly and wise.

He said no more; but if her grace had thought of a hundred plans for making him think of Madaline, she could not have adopted one more to the purpose.

From the moment Lord Arleigh believed that the young duchess intended to forbid all acquaintance with her fair *protégée*, he resolved to see her and to make her like him.

The day following he went again to the mansion; the duchess was at home, and wished to see him, but at that moment she was engaged. He was shown into the library, where in a few minutes she joined him.

"My dear Norman," she said, with a bright smile of greeting, "Vere told me, if you came, to keep you for luncheon; he wants to see you particularly. The horse that won the Derby, he has been told, is for sale, and he wants you to see it with him."

"I shall be very pleased," replied Lord Arleigh. "You seem hurried this morning, Philippa."

"Yes; such a *contretemps!* Just as I was anticipating a few hours with you, the Countess of Farnley came in, with the terrible announcement that she was here to spend the morning. I have to submit to fate, and listen to the account of Clara's last conquests, of the infamous behavior of her maid, of Lord Farnley's propensity for indiscreet flirtations. I tell her there is safety in number. I have to look kind and sympathetic while I am bored to death."

"Shall I accompany you and help you to amuse Lady Farnley?"

She repeated the words with a little laugh.

"Amuse Lady Farnley? I never undertake the impossible. You might as well ask me to move the monument, it would be quite as easy."

"Shall I help her to amuse you, then?" he said.

"No, I will not impose on your friendship. Make yourself as comfortable as you can, and I will try to hasten her departure."

Just as she was going away Lord Arleigh called to her.

"Philippa!" she turned her beautiful head half impatiently to him.

"What is it, Norman? Quick! The countess will think I am lost."

"May I go into your pretty rose-garden?" he asked.

She laughed.

"What a question! Certainly; you my go just where you please."

"She has forgotten her companion," he said to himself, "or she is not about."

He went into the morning-room and through the long, open French window; there were the lovely roses in bloom, and there —oh, kind, blessed fate!—there was his beautiful Madaline, seated in the pretty trellised arbor, busily working some fine

point-lace, looking herself like the fairest flower that ever bloomed.

The young girl looked up at him with a startled glance– shy, sweet, hesitating—and then he went up to her.

"Do not let me disturb you," he said. "The duchess is engaged, and gave me permission to wait for her here."

She bowed, and he fancied that her white fingers trembled.

"May I introduce myself to you?" he continued. "I am Lord Arleigh."

A beautiful blush, exquisite as the hue of the fairest rose, spread over her face. She looked at him with a smile.

"Lord Arleigh," she repeated—"I know the name very well."

"You know my name very well—how is that?" he asked, in surprise.

"It is a household word here," she said; "I hear it at least a hundred times a day."

"Do you? I can only hope that you are not tired of it."

"No, indeed I am not;" and then she drew back with a sudden hesitation, as though it had just occurred to her that she was talking freely to a stranger.

He saw her embarrassment, and did his best to remove it.

"How beautiful these roses are!" he said, gently. "The duchess is fortunate to have such a little paradise here."

"She ought to be surrounded by everything that is fairest and most beautiful on earth," she declared, "for there is no one like her."

"You are fond of her?" he said.

She forgot all her shyness, and raised her blue eyes to his.

"Fond of her? I love her better than any one on earth—except, perhaps, my mother. I could never have dreamed of any one so fair, so bewitching, so kind as the duchess."

"And she seems attached to you," he said, earnestly.

"She is very good to me—she is goodness itself;" and the blue eyes, with their depth of poetry and passion, first gleamed with light, and then filled with tears.

"We must be friends," said Lord Arleigh, "for I, too, love the duchess. She has been like a sister to me ever since I can remember;" and he drew nearer to the beautiful girl as he spoke. "Will you include me among your friends?" he continued. "This is not the first time that I have seen you. I stood watching you yesterday; you were among the roses, and I was in the morning-room. I thought then, and I have thought ever since, that I would give anything to be included among your friends."

His handsome face flushed as he spoke, his whole soul was in his eyes.

"Will you look upon me as one of your friends?" he repeated,

and his voice was full of softest music. He saw that even her white brow grew crimson.

"A friend of mine, my lord?" she exclaimed. "How can I? Surely you know I am not of your rank—I am not one of the class from which you select your friends."

"What nonsense!" he exclaimed. "If that is your only objection, I can soon remove it. I grant that there may be some trifling difference. For instance, I may have a title; you—who are a thousand times more worthy of one—have none. What of that? A title does not make a man. What is the difference between us? Your beauty—nay, do not think me rude or abrupt—my heart is in every word that I say to you—your grace would ennoble any rank, as your friendship would ennoble any man."

She looked up at him, and said, gently:

"I do not think you quite understand."

"Yes, I do," he declared, eagerly; "I asked the duchess yesterday who you were, and she told me your whole story."

It was impossible for him not to see how she shrank with unutterable pain from the words. The point-lace fell on the grass at her feet—she covered her face with her hands.

"Did she? Oh, Lord Arleigh, it was cruel to tell it!"

"It was not cruel to tell me," he returned. "She would not tell any one else, I am quite sure. But she saw that I was really anxious—that I must know it—that it was not from curiosity I asked."

"Not from curiosity!" she repeated, still hiding her burning face with her hands.

"No, it was from a very different motive." And then he paused abruptly. What was he going to say? How far had he already left all conventionality behind? He stopped just in time, and then continued, gravely: "The Duchess of Hazlewood and myself are such true and tried friends that we never think of keeping any secrets from each other. We have been, as I told you before, brother and sister all our lives—it was only natural that she should tell me about you."

"And, having heard my story, you ask me to be one of your friends?" she said, slowly. There were pain and pathos in her voice as she spoke.

"Yes," he replied, "having heard it all, I desire nothing on earth so much as to win your friendship."

"My mother?" she murmured.

"Yes—your mother's unfortunate marriage, and all that came of it. I can repeat the story."

"Oh, no!" she interrupted. "I do not wish to hear it. You know it, and you would still be my friend?"

"Answer me one question," he said, gently. "Is this sad

story the result of any fault of yours? Are you in any way to blame for it?"

"No; not in the least. Still, Lord Arleigh, although I do not share the fault, I share the disgrace—nothing can avert that from me."

"Nothing of the kind," he opposed; "disgrace and yourself are as incompatible as pitch and a dove's wing."

"But," she continued, wonderingly, "do you quite understand?"

"Yes; the duchess told me the whole story. I understand it, and am truly grieved for you; I know the duke's share in it and all."

He saw her face grow pale even to the lips.

"And yet you would be my friend—you whom people call proud—you whose very name is history! I cannot believe it, Lord Arleigh."

There was a wistful look in her eyes, as though she would fain believe that it were true, yet that she was compelled to plead even against herself.

"We cannot account for likes or dislikes," he said; "I always look upon them as nature's guidance as to whom we should love, and whom we should avoid. The moment I saw you I—liked you. I went home, and thought about you all day long."

"Did you?" she asked, wonderingly. "How very strange!"

"It does not seem strange to me," he observed. "Before I had looked at you three minutes I felt as though I had known you all my life. How long have we been talking here? Ten minutes, perhaps—yet I feel as though already there is something that has cut us off from the rest of the world, and left us alone together. There is no accounting for such strange feelings as these."

"No," she replied, dreamily, "I do not think there is."

"Perhaps," he continued, "I may have been fanciful all my life; but years ago, when I was a boy at school, I pictured to myself a heroine such as I thought I should love when I came to be a man."

She had forgotten her sweet, half sad shyness, and sat with a faint flush on her face, her lips parted, her blue eyes fixed on his.

"A heroine of my own creation," he went on; "and I gave her an ideal face—lilies and roses blended, rose-leaf lips, a white brow, eyes the color of hyacinths, and hair of pale gold."

"That is a pretty picture," she said, all unconscious that it was her own portrait he had sketched.

His eyes softened and gleamed at the *naïveté* of the words.

"I am glad you think so. Then my heroine had, in my

fancy, a mind and soul that suited her face—pure, original, half sad, wholly sweet, full of poetry."

She smiled as though charmed with the picture.

"Then I grew to be a youth, and then to be a man," he continued. "I looked everywhere for my ideal among all the fair women I knew, I looked in courts and palaces, I looked in country houses, but I could not find her. I looked at home and abroad, I looked at all times and all seasons, but I could not find her."

He saw a shadow come over the sweet, pure face as though she felt sorry for him.

"So time passed, and I began to think that I should never find my ideal, that I must give her up, when one day, quite unexpectedly, I saw her."

There was a gleam of sympathy in the blue eyes.

"I found her at last," he continued. "It was one bright June morning; she was sitting out among the roses, ten thousand times fairer and sweeter than they."

She looked at him with a startled glance; not the faintest idea had occurred to her that he was speaking of her.

"Do you understand me?" he asked.

"I—I am frightened, Lord Arleigh."

"Nay, why should you fear? What is there to fear? It is true. The moment I saw you sitting here I knew that you were my ideal, found at last."

"But," she said, with the simple wonder of a child. "I am not like the portrait you sketched."

"You are unlike it only because you are a hundred times fairer," he replied; "that is why I inquired about you—why I asked so many questions. It was because you were to me a dream realized. So it came about that I heard your true history. Now will you be my friend?"

"If you still wish it, Lord Arleigh, yes; but, if you repent of having asked me, and should ever feel ashamed of our friendship, remember that I shall not reproach you for giving me up."

"Giving you up?" cried Lord Arleigh. "Ah, Madaline—let me call you Madaline, the name is so sweet—I shall never give you up! When a man has been for many years looking for some one to fill his highest and brightest dreams, he knows how to appreciate that some one when found."

"It seems all so strange," she said, musingly.

"Nay, why strange? You have read that sweetest and saddest of all love stories—'Romeo and Juliet?' Did *Juliet* think it strange that, so soon after seeing her, *Romeo* should be willing to give his life for her?"

"No, it did not seem strange to them," she replied, with a

smile; "but it is different with us. This is the nineteenth century, and there are no *Juliets.*"

"There are plenty of *Romeos*, though," he remarked, laughingly. "The sweetest dreams in my life are the briefest. Will you pluck one of those roses for me and give it to me, saying, 'I promise to be your friend?'"

"You make me do things against my will," she said; but she plucked a rose, and held it toward him in her hand. "I promise to be your friend," she said, gently.

Lord Arleigh kissed the rose. As he did so their eyes met; and it would have been hard to tell which blushed the more deeply. After that, meetings between them became more frequent. Lord Arleigh made seeing her the one great study of his life—and the result was what might be imagined.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The yacht of Mr. Conyers, one of the richest commoners in England—a yacht fitted as surely no yacht ever before had been fitted—was for sale. He was a wealthy man, but to keep that sea-palace afloat was beyond his means. The Duchess of Hazlewood was sole mistress of a large fortune in her own right; the duke had made most magnificent settlements upon her. She had a large sum of money at her command; and the idea suddenly occurred to her to purchase Mr. Conyers' yacht unknown to her husband and present him with it. He was fond of yachting—it was his favorite amusement. She herself was a wretched sailor, and would not be able to accompany him; but that would not matter. It was not of her own pleasure that the Duchess of Hazlewood was thinking, while the old strange brooding smile lingered on her beautiful face and deepened on her perfect lips.

"It would be the very thing," she said to herself, "it would afford to me the opportunity I am seeking—nothing could be better."

She purchased the yacht and presented it to the duke, her husband. His pleasure and astonishment were unbounded. She was, as a rule, so undemonstrative that he could not thank her sufficiently for what seemed to him her great interest in his favorite pursuit.

"The only drawback to the splendid gift, Philippa, is that you can never enjoy it; it will take me away from you."

"Yes, I do indeed deplore that I am a wretched sailor, for I can imagine nothing pleasanter than life on board such a yacht

as that. But, while you are cruising about, Vere, I shall go to Verdun Royal and take Madaline with me; then I shall go to Vere Court—make a kind of royal progress, set everything straight and redress all wrongs, hold a court at each establishment. I shall enjoy that more than yachting."

"But I shall miss you so much, Philippa," said the young husband.

"We have the remainder of our lives to spend together," she rejoined; "if you are afraid of missing me too much, you had better get rid of the yacht."

But he would not hear of that—he was delighted with the beautiful and valuable present. The yacht was christened "Queen Philippa"; and it was decided that, when the end of the season had come, the duke should take his beautiful wife to Verdun Royal, and, after having installed her there, should go at once to sea. He had invited a party of friends—all yachtsmen like himself—and they had agreed to take "Queen Philippa" to the Mediterranean, there to cruise during the autumn months.

As it was settled so it was carried out; before the week had ended the duke, duchess, and Madeline were all at Verdun Royal. Perhaps the proud young wife had never realized before how completely her husband loved her. This temporary parting was to him a real pain.

A few days before it took place he began to look pale and ill. She saw that he could not eat, that he did not sleep or rest. Her heart was touched by his simple fidelity, his passionate love, although the one fell purpose of her life remained unchanged.

"If you dislike going, Vere," she said to him one day, "do not go—stay at Verdun Royal."

"The world would laugh if I did that, Philippa," he returned; "it would guess at once what was the reason, because every one knows how dearly I love you. We should be called *Darby* and *Joan*."

"No one would ever dare to call me *Joan*," she said, "for I have nothing of *Joan* in me."

The duke sighed—perhaps he thought that it would be all the better if she had; but, fancying there was something, after all, slightly contemptuous in her manner, as though she thought it unmanly in him to repine about leaving her, he said no more.

One warm, brilliant day he took leave of her, and she was left to work out her purpose. She never forgot the day of his departure—it was one of those hot days when the summer skies seemed to be half obscured by a copper-colored haze, when the green leaves hang languidly, and the birds seek the coolest shade, when the flowers droop with thirst, and never a breath of air stir their blossoms, when there is no picture so refreshing to the senses as that of a cool deep pool in the recesses of a wood.

She stood at the grand entrance, watching him depart, and she knew that with all her beauty, her grace, her talent, her sovereignty, no one had ever loved her as this man did. Then, after he was gone, she stood still on the broad stone terrace, with that strange smile on her face, which seemed to mar while it deepened her beauty.

"It will be a full revenge," she said to herself. "There could be no fuller. But what shall I do when it is all known?"

She was not one to flinch from the course of action she had marked out for herself, nor from the consequences of that course; but she shuddered even in the heat, as she thought what her life would be when her vengeance was taken.

"He will never forgive me," she said, "he will look upon me as the wickedest of women. It does not matter; he should not have exasperated me by slighting me."

Then the coppery haze seemed to gather itself together—great purple masses of clouds piled themselves in the sky, a lurid light overspread the heavens, the dense oppressive silence was broken by a distant peal of thunder, great rain-drops fell—fierce, heavy drops. The trees seemed to stretch out their leaves to drink in the moisture, the parched flowers welcomed the downpour; and still the Duchess of Hazlewood stood out on the terrace, so deeply engrossed in her thoughts that she never heeded the rain.

Madaline hastened out to her with a shawl.

"Dear duchess," she cried, "it is raining; and you are so absorbed in thought that you do not notice it."

She laughed a strange, weird laugh, and raised her beautiful face with its expression of gloom.

"I did not notice it, Madaline," she said; "but there is no need for anxiety about me," she added, proudly.

They re entered the house together. Madaline believed that the duchess was thinking of and grieving over the departure of the duke. Lady Peters thought the same. They both did their best to comfort her—to amuse her and distract her thoughts. But the absent expression did not die from her dark eyes. When they had talked to her some little time she took up the "Lady of Lyons."

"How much you admire that play," said Madaline; "I see you reading it so often."

"I have a fancy for it," returned the duchess; "it suits my taste. And I admire the language very much."

"Yet it is a cruel story," observed Madaline; "the noblest character in it is *Pauline*."

"She was very proud; and pride, I suppose, must suffer," said the duchess, carelessly.

"She was not too proud, after all, to love a noble man, when she once recognized him, duchess."

"She learned to love the prince—she would never have loved the gardener," remarked Philippa; "it was a terrible vengeance."

"I do not like stories of vengeance," said Madaline. "After all, though, I love the *Claude* of the story, and find much true nobility in him—much to admire. When reading the play I am tempted all the time to ask myself, How could he do it? It was an unmanly act."

There was a strange light in the dark eyes, a quiver on the scarlet lips, as Philippa said:

"Do you think so? Suppose some one had offended you as *Pauline* offended *Claude*—laughing at the love offered, scorned, mocked, despised you—and that such vengeance as his lay in your power; would you not take it?"

The sweet face flushed.

"No, I would rather die," Madaline replied, quickly.

"I would take it, and glory in it," said the duchess, firmly. "If I were wounded, insulted, and slighted as *Claude* was, I would take the cruelest revenge that I could."

Madaline took one of the jeweled hands in her own and kissed it.

"I should never be afraid of you," she said; "you can never hurt any one. Your vengeance would end in the bestowal of a favor."

"Do you think so highly of me, Madaline?" asked Philippa, sadly.

"Think highly of you! Why, you would laugh if you knew how I loved you—how I adore you. If all the world were to swear to me that you could do the least thing wrong, I should not believe them."

"Poor child!" said the duchess, sadly.

"Why do you call me 'poor child?'" she asked, laughingly.

"Because you have such implicit faith, and are sure to be so cruelly disappointed."

"I would rather have such implicit faith, and bear the disappointment, than be without both," said Madaline.

CHAPTER XIX.

On the day of his departure the duke had said to his wife:

"I have invited Norman to spend a few weeks with you; have some pleasant people to meet him. He tells me he shall not go to Scotland this year."

"I will ask Miss Byrton and Lady Sheldon," Philippa had promised.

"Only two ladies!" the duke had laughed. "He will want some one to smoke his cigar with."

"I will trust to some happy inspiration at the time, then," she had replied; and they had not mentioned the matter again.

Early in August Lord Arleigh wrote that if it were convenient he should prefer paying his promised visit at once. He concluded his letter by saying:

"My dear Philippa, your kind, good husband has said something to me about meeting a pleasant party. I should so much prefer one of my old style visits—no parties, no ceremonies. I want to see you and Verdun Royal, not a crowd of strange faces. Lady Peters is *chaperon*, if you have any lingering doubt about the 'proprieties.'"

So it was agreed that he should come alone, and later on, if the duchess cared to invite more friends, she could do so.

The fact was that Lord Arleigh wanted time for his wooing. He had found that he could not live without Madaline. He had thought most carefully about everything, and had decided on asking her to be his wife. True, there was the drawback of her parentage—but that was not grievous, not so terrible. Of course, if she had been lowly-born—descended from the dregs of the people, or the daughter of a criminal—he would have trampled his love under foot. He would have said to himself: "*Noblesse oblige*," and rather than tarnish the honor of his family, he would have given her up.

This was not needed. Related to the Duke of Hazlewood, there could not be anything wrong. The duchess had told him distinctly that Madaline's mother had married beneath her, and that the whole family on that account had completely ignored her. He did not remember that the duchess had told him so in as many words, but he was decidedly of the opinion that Madaline's mother was a cousin of the duke's, and that she had married a drawing-master, who had afterward turned out wild and profligate. The drawing-master was dead. His darling Madaline had good blood in her veins—was descended from an ancient and noble family. That she had neither fortune nor position was immaterial to him. He had understood from the duchess that the mother of his fair young love lived in quiet retirement. He could not remember in what words all this had been told to him, but this was the impression that was on his mind. So he had determined on making Madaline his wife if he could but win her consent. The only thing to be feared was her own unwillingness. She was fair and fragile, but she had a wonderful strength of will.

He had thought it all over. He remembered well what the duchess had said about the duke's not caring to hear the matter mentioned. Lord Arleigh could understand that, with all his gentleness, Hazlewood was a proud man, and that, if there had been a *mésalliance* in his family, he would be the last to wish it discussed. Still Lord Arleigh knew that he would approve of the marriage. It was plain, however, that it would be better for it to take place while he was away from England, and then it would not, could not in any way compromise him. A quiet marriage would not attract attention.

If he could only win Madaline's consent. She had been so unwilling to promise him her friendship, and then so unwilling to hear that he loved her. He could form no idea how she would receive the offer of marriage that he intended to make her.

That was why he wished to go alone. He would have time and opportunity then. As for Philippa, he did not fear any real objection from her; if she once believed or thought that his heart was fixed on marrying Madaline, he was sure she would help him.

Marry Madaline he must—life was nothing to him without her. He had laughed at the fever called love. He knew now how completely love had mastered him. He could think of nothing but Madaline.

He went down to Verdun Royal, heart and soul so completely wrapped in Madaline that he hardly remembered Philippa—hardly remembered that he was going as her guest; he was going to woo Madaline—fair, sweet Madaline—to ask her to be his wife, to try to win her for his own.

It was afternoon when he reached Verdun Royal. The glory of summer was over the earth. He laughed at himself, for he was nervous and timid; he longed to see Madaline, yet trembled at the thought of meeting her.

"So this is love?" said Lord Arleigh to himself, with a smile. "I used to wonder why it made men cowards, and what there was to fear; I can understand it now."

Then he saw the gray towers and turrets of Verdun Royal rising from the trees; he thought of his childish visits to the house, and how his mother taught him to call the child Philippa his little wife. Who would have thought in those days that Philippa would live to be a duchess, and that he should so wildly worship, so madly love a fairer, younger face?

He was made welcome at Verdun Royal. Lady Peters received him as though he were her own son. Then the duchess entered, with a glad light in her eyes, and a smile that was half wistful. She greeted him warmly; she was pleased to see him—pleased to welcome him; the whole house was at his service,

and everything in it. He had never seen the duchess look better; she wore her favorite colors, amber and white.

"I have attended to your wishes, Norman," she said; "you must not blame me if you are dull. I have asked no one to meet you."

"There is no fear of my ever being dull here, Philippa," he returned. "You forget that I am almost as much at home as you are yourself. I can remember when I looked upon coming to Verdun Royal as coming home."

A shadow of pain crossed her face at this reference to those early, happy days. Then he summoned up courage, and said to her:

"Where is your fair companion, Philippa?"

"She is somewhere about the grounds," replied the duchess. "I can never persuade her to remain in-doors unless she has something to do, So you have not forgotten her?" added the duchess, after a short pause.

"I have not forgotten her, Philippa. I shall have something very important to say to you about her before I go away again."

She gave no sign that she understood him, but began to talk to him on a number of indifferent matters—the warmth of the weather, his journey down, the last news from her husband—and he answered her somewhat impatiently. His thoughts were with Madaline.

At last the signal of release came.

"We need not play at 'company,' Norman," said the duchess. "As you say, Verdun Royal has always been like home to you. Continue to make it so. We dine at eight—it is now nearly five. You will find plenty to amuse yourself with. Whenever you wish for my society, you will find me in the drawing-room or my *boudoir*."

He murmured some faint word of thanks, thinking to himself how considerate she was, and that she guessed he wanted to find Madaline. With a smile on her face, she turned to him as she was quitting the room.

"Vere seemed very uneasy, when he was going away, lest you should not feel at liberty to smoke when you liked," she said. "Pray do not let the fact of his absence prevent you from enjoying a cigar whenever you feel inclined for one."

"A thousand thanks, Philippa," returned Lord Arleigh, inwardly hoping that Madaline would give him scant time for the enjoyment of cigars.

Then he went across the lawn, wondering how she would look, where he should find her, and what she would say to him when she saw him. Once or twice he fancied he saw the glimmer of a white dress between the trees. He wondered if she felt shy at seeing him, as he did at seeing her. Then suddenly—it was as

though a bright light had fallen from the skies—he came upon her standing under a great linden tree.

"Madaline!" he said, gently. And she came to him with outstretched hands.

CHAPTER XX.

Later on that afternoon the heat seemed to have increased, not lessened, and the ladies had declared even the cool, shaded drawing-room, with its sweet scents and mellowed light, to be too warm; so they had gone out on to the lawn, where a sweet western wind was blowing. Lady Peters had taken with her a book, which she made some pretense of reading, but over which her eyes closed in most suspicious fashion. The duchess, too, had a book, but she made no pretense of opening it—her beautiful face had a restless, half-wistful expression. They had quitted the drawing-room all together, but Madaline had gone to gather some peaches. The duchess liked them freshly gathered, and Madaline knew no delight so keen as that of giving her pleasure.

When she had been gone some few minutes, Lord Arleigh asked where she was, and the duchess owned, laughingly, to her fondness for ripe, sun-kissed peaches.

"Madaline always contrives to find the very best for me," she said. "She is gone to look for some now."

"I will go and help her," said Lord Arleigh, looking at Philippa's face. He thought the fair cheeks themselves not unlike peaches, with their soft, sweet, vivid coloring.

She smiled to herself with bitter scorn as he went away.

"It works well," she said; "but it is his own fault—Heaven knows, his own fault."

An hour afterward Lady Peters said to her, in a very solemn tone of voice:

"Philippa, my dear, it may not be my duty to speak, but I cannot help asking you if you notice anything?"

"No, nothing at this minute."

But Lady Peters shook her head with deepest gravity.

"Do you not notice the great attention that Lord Arleigh pays your beautiful young companion?"

"Yes, I have noticed it," said the duchess—and all her efforts did not prevent a burning, passionate flush rising to her face.

"May I ask you what you think of it, my dear?"

"I think nothing of it. If Lord Arleigh chooses to fall in love with her, he may. I warned him when she first came to live with me—I kept her most carefully out of his sight; and

then, when I could no longer conveniently do so, I told him that he must not fall in love with her. I told him of her birth, antecedents, misfortunes—everything connected with her. His own mother or sister could not have warned him more sensibly."

"And what was the result?" asked Lady Peters, gravely.

"Just what one might have expected from a man," laughed the duchess. "Warn them against any particular thing, and it immediately possesses a deep attraction for them. The result was that he said she was his ideal, fairly, fully, and perfectly realized. I, of course, could say no more."

"But," cried Lady Peters, aghast, "you do not think it probable that he will marry her?"

"I cannot tell. He is a man of honor. He would not make love to her without intending to marry her."

"But there is not a better family in England than the Arleighs of Beechgrove, Philippa. It would be terrible for him—such a *mésalliance;* surely he will never dream of it."

"She is beautiful, graceful, gifted, and good," was the rejoinder. "But it is useless for us to argue about the matter. He has said nothing about marrying her; he has only called her his ideal."

"I cannot understand it," said poor Lady Peters. "It seems strange to me."

She would have thought it stranger still if she had followed them and heard what Lord Arleigh was saying.

He had followed Madaline to the southern wall, whereon the luscious peaches and apricots grew. He found her, as the duchess had intimated, busily engaged in choosing the ripest and best. He thought he had never seen a fairer picture than this golden-haired girl standing by the green leaves and rich fruit. He thought of Tennyson's "Gardener's daughter."

> "One arm aloft——
> Gowned in pure white that fitted to the shape—
> Holding the bush, to fix it back, she stood.
> The full day dwelt on her brows and sunned
> Her violet eyes, and all her Hebe bloom,
> And doubled his own warmth against her lips,
> And on the beauteous wave of such a breast
> As never pencil drew. Half light, half shade,
> She stood, a sight to make an old man young."

He repeated the lines as he stood watching her, and then he went nearer and called:

"Madaline!"

Could he doubt that she loved him? Her fair face flushed deepest crimson; but, instead of turning to him, she moved half coyly, half shyly away.

"How quick you are," he said, "to seize every opportunity of evading me! Do you think you can escspe me, Madaline? Do you think my love is so weak, so faint, so feeble, that it can be pushed aside lightly by your will? Do you think that, if you tried to get to the other end of the world, you could escape me?"

Half blushing, half laughing, trembling, yet with a happy light in her blue eyes, she said:

"I think you are more terrible than any one I know."

"I am glad that you are growing frightened, and are willing to own that you have a master—that is as it should be. I want to talk to you, Madaline. You evade me lest you should be compelled to speak to me; you lower those beautiful eyes of yours, lest I should be made happy by looking into them. If you find it possible to avoid my presence, to run away from me, you do. I am sure to woo you, to win you, to make you my sweet, dear wife—to make you happier, I hope, than any woman has ever been before—and you try to evade me, fair, sweet, cruel Madaline!"

"I am afraid of you, Lord Arleigh," she said, little dreaming how much the naïve confession implied.

"Afraid of me! That is because you see that I am quite determined to win you. I can easily teach you how to forget all fear."

"Can you?" she asked, doubtfully.

"Yes, I can, indeed, Madaline. Deposit those peaches in their green leaves on the ground. Now place both your hands in mine."

She quietly obeyed the first half of his request as though she were a child, and then she paused. The sweet face crimsoned again; he took her hands in his.

"You must be obedient," he said. "Now look at me."

But the white lids drooped over the happy eyes.

"Look at me, Madaline," he repeated, "and say, 'Norman, I do love you. I will forget all the nonsense I have talked about inequality of position, and will be your wife.'"

"In justice to yourself I cannot say it."

He felt the little hands tremble in his grasp, and he released them with a kiss.

"You will be compelled to say it some day, darling. You might as well try now. If I cannot win you for my wife, I will have no wife, Madaline. Ah, now you are sorry you have vexed me!

"'And so it was—half sly, half shy;
You would and would not, little one,
Although I pleaded tenderly
And you and I were all alone.'

Why are you so hard, Madaline? I am sure you like me a little; you dare not raise your eyes to mine and say, 'I do not love you, Norman.'"

"No," she confessed, "I dare not. But there is love and love; the lowest love is all self, the highest is all sacrifice. I like the highest."

And then her eyes fell on the peaches, and she gave a little cry of alarm.

"What will the duchess say?" she cried. "Oh, Lord Arleigh, let me go."

"Give me one kind word, then."

"What am I to say? Oh, do let me go!"

"Say, 'I like you, Norman.'"

"I like you, Norman," she said; and, taking up the peaches, she hastened away. Yet, with her flushed face and the glad light in her happy eyes, she did not dare to present herself at once before the duchess and Lady Peters.

CHAPTER XXI.

Was there some strange, magnetic attraction between Lord Arleigh and Madaline, or could it be that the *valet*, knowing or guessing the state of his master's affections, gave what he no doubt considered a timely hint? Something of the kind must have happened, for Madaline, unable to sleep, unable to rest, had risen in the early morning, while the dew was on the grass, and had gone out into the shade of the woods. The August sun shone brightly, a soft wind fanned her cheeks.

Madaline looked round before she entered the woods. The square turrets of Verdun Royal rose high above the trees. They were tall and massive, with great umbrageous boughs and massive, rugged trunks, the boughs almost reaching down to the long, thick grass. A little brook went singing through the woods—a brook of clear, rippling water. Madaline sat down by the brook-side. Her head ached for want of sleep, her heart was stirred by a hundred varied emotions.

Did she love him? Why ask herself the question? She did love him—she trembled to think how much. It was that very love which made her hesitate. She hardly dared to think of him. In her great humility she overlooked entirely the fact of her own great personal loveliness, her rare grace and gifts. She could only wonder what there was in her that could attract him.

He was a descendant of one of the oldest families in England —he had a title, he was wealthy, clever, he had every great and good gift—yet he loved her; he stooped from his exalted position to love her, and she, for his own sake, wished to refuse his love. But she found it difficult.

She sat down by the brook-side, and, perhaps for the first time in her gentle life, a feeling of dissatisfaction rose within her; yet it was not so much that as a longing that she could be different from what she was—a wish that she had been nobly born, endowed with some great gift that would have brought her nearer to him. How happy she would have been then—how proud to love him—how glad to devote her sweet young life to him! At present it was different; the most precious thing that she could give him—which was her love—would be most prejudicial to him. And just as that thought came to her, causing the blue eyes to fill with tears, she saw him standing before her.

She was not surprised; he was so completely part and parcel of her thoughts and her life that she would never have felt surprised at seeing him. He came up to her quietly.

"My darling Madaline, your face is pale, and there are tears in your eyes. What is the matter? What has brought you out here when you ought to be in-doors? What is the trouble that has taken away the roses and put lilies in their place?"

"I have no trouble, Lord Arleigh," she replied. "I came here only to think."

"To think of what, sweet?"

Her face flushed.

"I cannot tell you," she answered. "You cannot expect that I should tell you everything."

"You tell me nothing, Madaline. A few words from you would make me the happiest man in the world, yet you will not speak them."

Then all the assumed lightness and carelessness died from his manner. He came nearer to her; her eyes drooped before the fire of his.

"Madaline, my love, let me plead to you," he said, "for the gift of your love. Give me that, and I shall be content. You think I am proud," he continued; "I am not one-half so proud, sweet, as you. You refuse to love me—why? Because of your pride. You have some foolish notions that the difference in our positions should part us. You are quite wrong—love knows no such difference."

"But the world does," she interrupted.

"The world!" he repeated, with contempt. "Thank Heaven it is not my master! What matters what the world says?"

"You owe more to the name and honor of your family than to the world," she said.

"Of that," he observed, "you must allow me to be the best judge."

She bowed submissively.

"The dearest thing in life to me is the honor of my name, the honor of my race," said Lord Arleigh. "It has never been tarnished, and I pray Heaven that no stain may ever rest upon it. I will be frank with you, Madaline, as you are with me, though I love you so dearly that my very life is bound up in yours. I would not ask you to be my wife if I thought that in doing so I was bringing a shadow of dishonor on my race—if I thought that I was in even ever so slight a degree tarnishing my name; but I do not think so. I speak to you frankly. I know the story of your misfortunes, and, knowing it, do not deem it sufficient to part us. Listen and believe me, Madaline—if I stood with you before the altar, with your hand in mine, and the solemn words of the marriage service on my lips, and anything even then came to my knowledge which I thought prejudicial to the fame and honor of my race, I should without hesitation ask you to release me. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," she replied, slowly, "I believe you."

"Then why not trust me fully? I know your story—it is an old story after all. I know it by heart; I am the best judge of it. I have weighed it most carefully; it has not been a lightly-considered matter with me at all, and, after thinking it well over, I have come to the conclusion that it is not sufficient to part us. You see, sweet, that you may implicitly believe me. I have no false gloss of compliments. Frankly, as you yourself would do, I admit the drawback; but, unlike you, I affirm that it does not matter."

"But would you always think so? The time might come when the remembrance of my father's——"

"Hush!" he said, gently. "The matter must never be discussed between us. I tell you frankly that I should not care for the whole world to know your story. I know it—the duke and duchess know it. There is no need for it to be known to others; and, believe me, Madaline, it will never be and need never be known—we may keep it out of sight. It is not likely that I shall ever repent, for it will never be of any more importance to me than it is now."

He paused abruptly, for her blue eyes were looking wistfully at him.

"What is it, Madaline?" he asked, gently.

"I wish you would let me tell you all about it—how my mother, so gentle and good, came to marry my father, and how he fell—how he was tempted and fell. May I tell you, Lord Arleigh?"

"No," he replied, after a short pause, "I would rather not

hear it. The duchess has told me all I care to know. It will be better, believe me, for the whole story to die away. If I had wished to hear it, I should have asked you to tell it me."

"It would make me happier," she said; "I should know then that there was no mistake."

"There is no mistake, my darling—the duchess has told me; and it is not likely that she has made a mistake, is it?"

"No. She knows the whole story from beginning to end. If she has told you, you know all."

"Certainly I do; and, knowing all, I have come here to beg you to make me happy, to honor me with your love, to be my wife. Ah, Madaline, do not let your pride part us!"

He saw that she trembled and hesitated.

"Only imagine what life must be for us, Madaline, if we part. You would perhaps go on living with the duchess all your life—for, in spite of your coyness and your fear, I believe you love me so well, darling, that, unless you marry me, you will marry no one—you would drag on a weary, tried, sad, unhappy existence, that would not have in it one gleam of comfort."

"It is true," she said, slowly.

"Of course it is true. And what would become of me? The sun would have no more brightness for me; the world would be as a desert; the light would die from my life. Oh, Madaline, make me happy by loving me!"

"I do love you," she said, unguardedly.

"Then why not be my wife?"

She drew back trembling, her face pale as death.

"Why not be my wife?" he repeated.

"It is for your own sake," she said. "Can you not see? Do you not understand?"

"For my sake. Then I shall treat you as a vanquished kingdom—I shall take possession of you, my darling, my love!"

Bending down, he kissed her face—and this time she made no resistance to his sovereign will.

"Now," said Lord Arleigh, triumphantly, "you are my very own, nothing can separate us—that kiss seals our betrothal; you must forget all doubts, all fears, all hesitation, and only say to yourself that you are mine—all mine. Will you be happy, Madaline?"

She raised her eyes to his, her face bedewed with happy tears.

"I should be most ungrateful if I were not happy," she replied; "you are so good to me, Lord Arleigh."

"You must not call me 'Lord Arleigh'—say 'Norman.'"

"Norman," she repeated, "you are so good to me."

"I love you so well, sweet," he returned.

The happy eyes were raised to his face.

"Will you tell me," she asked, "why you love me, Norman?

I cannot think why it is. I wonder about it every day. You see girls a thousand times better suited to you than I am. Why do you love me so?"

"What a question to answer, sweet! How can I tell why I love you? I cannot help it; my soul is attracted to your soul, my heart to your heart, Madaline. I shall be unwilling to leave you again; when I go away from Verdun Royal, I shall want to take my wife with me."

She looked at him in alarm.

"I am quite serious," he continued. "You are so sensitive, so full of hesitation, that, if I leave you, you will come to the conclusion that you have done wrong, and will write me a pathetic little letter, and go away."

"No, I shall not do that," she observed.

"I shall not give you a chance, my own; I shall neither rest myself nor let any one else rest until you are my wife. I will not distress you now by talking about it. I shall go to the duchess to-day, and tell her that you have relented in my favor at last; then you will let us decide for you, Madaline, will you not?"

"Yes," she replied, with a smile; "it would be useless for me to rebel."

"You have made some very fatal admissions," he said, laughingly. "You have owned that you love me; after that, denial, resistance, coyness, shyness, nothing will avail. Oh, Madaline, I shall always love this spot where I won you! I will have a picture of this brook-side painted some day. We must go back to the house now; but, before we go, make me happy; tell me of your own free will that you love me."

"You know I do. I love you, Norman—I will say it now—I love you ten thousand times better than my life. I have loved you ever since I first saw you; but I was afraid to say so, because of—well, you know why."

"You are not afraid now, Madaline?"

"No, not now," she replied; "you have chosen me from all the world to be your wife. I will think of nothing but making you happy."

"In token of that, kiss me—just once—of your own free will."

"No," she refused, with a deep blush.

"You will, if you love me," he said; and then she turned her face to his. She raised her pure, sweet lips to his and kissed him, blushing as she did so to the very roots of her golden hair.

"You must never ask me to do that again," she said, gravely.

"No," returned he; "it was so remarkably unpleasant, Mad-

aline, I could not wish for a repetition;" and then they went back to the house together.

"Norman," said Madaline, as they stood before the great Gothic porch, "will you wait until to-morrow before you tell the duchess?"

"No," he laughed, "I shall tell her this very day."

CHAPTER XXII.

It was almost noon before Lord Arleigh saw Philippa, and then it struck him that she was not looking well. She seemed to have lost some of her brilliant color, and he fancied she was thinner than she used to be. She had sent for him to her *boudoir*.

"I heard that you were inquiring for me, Norman," she said. "Had you any especial reason for so doing?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have a most important reason. But you are not looking so bright as usual, Philippa. Are you not well?"

"The weather is too warm for one to look bright," she said; "much sunshine always tires me. Sit down here, Norman; my room looks cool enough, does it not?"

In its way her room was a triumph of art; the hangings were of pale amber and white—there was a miniature fountain cooling the air with its spray, choice flowers emitting sweet perfume. The fair young duchess was resting on a couch of amber satin; she held a richly-jeweled fan in her hands, which she used occasionally. She looked very charming in her dress of light material, her dark hair carelessly but artistically arranged. Still there was something about her unlike herself; her lips were pale, and her eyes had in them a strange, wistful expression. Norman took his seat near the little couch.

"I have come to make a confession, Philippa," he began.

"So I imagined; you look very guilty. What is it?"

"I have found my ideal. I love her, she loves me, and I want to marry her."

The pallor of the lovely lips deepened. For a few minutes no sound was heard except the falling of the spray of the fountain, and then the Duchess of Hazlewood looked up and said:

"Why do you make this confession to me, Norman?"

"Because it concerns some one in whom you are interested. It is Madaline whom I love, Madaline whom I wish to marry. But that is not strange news to you, I am sure, Philippa."

Again there was a brief silence; and then the duchess said, in a low voice:

"You must admit that I warned you, Norman, from the very first."

He raised his head proudly.

"You warned me? I do not understand."

"I kept her out of your sight. I told you it would be better for you not to see her. I advised you, did I not?"

She seemed rather to be pleading in self-defense than thinking of him.

"But, my dearest Philippa, I want no warning—I am very happy as to the matter I have nearest my heart. I thank you for bringing my sweet Madaline here. You do not seem to understand?"

She looked at him earnestly.

"Do you love her so very much, Norman?"

"I love her better than any words of mine can tell," he said. "The moment I saw her first I told you my dream was realized—I had found my ideal. I have loved her ever since."

"How strange!" murmured the duchess.

"Do you think it strange? Remember how fair and winsome she is—how sweet and gentle. I do not believe there is any one like her."

The white hand that held the jeweled fan moved more vigorously.

"Why do you tell me this, Norman? What do you wish me to do?"

"You have always been so kind to me," he said, "you have ever been as a sister, my best, dearest, truest friend. I could not have a feeling of this kind without telling you of it. Do you remember how you used to tease me about my ideal. Neither of us thought in those days that I should find her under your roof."

"No," said the duchess, quietly, "it is very strange."

"I despaired of winning Madaline," he continued. "She had such strange ideas of the wonderful distance between us—she thought so much more of me than of herself, of the honor of my family and my name—that, to tell you the truth, Philippa, I thought I should never win her consent to be my wife."

"And you have won it at last," she put in, with quiet gravity.

"Yes—at last. This morning she promised to be my wife."

The dark eyes looked straight into his own.

"It is a miserable marriage for you, Norman. Granted that Madaline has beauty, grace, purity, she is without fortune, connection, position. You, an Arleigh of Beechgrove, ought to do better. I am speaking as the world will speak. It is really a wretched marriage."

"I can afford to laugh at the world and please myself in the

choice of a wife. There are certain circumstances under which I would not have married any one; these circumstances do not surround my darling. She stands out clear and distinct as a bright jewel from the rest of the world. To-day she promised to be my wife, but she is so sensitive and hesitating that I am almost afraid I shall lose her even now, and I want to marry her as soon as I can."

"But why," again asked the duchess, "do you tell me this?"

"Because it concerns you most nearly. She lives under your roof—she is, in some measure, your *portégée.*"

"Vere will be very angry when he hears of it," said the duchess. And then Lord Arleigh looked up proudly.

"I do not see why he should. It is certainly no business of his."

"He will think it so strange."

"It is no stranger than any other marriage," said Lord Arleigh. "Philippa, you disappoint me. I expected more sympathy at least from you."

The tone of his voice was so full of pain that she looked up quickly.

"Do you think me unkind, Norman. You could not expect any true friend of yours to be very delighted at such a marriage as this, could you?" It seemed as though she knew and understood that opposition made his own plan seem only the dearer to him. "Still I have no wish to fail in sympathy. Madaline is very lovely and very winning—I have a great affection for her—and I think—nay, I am quite sure—that she loves you very dearly."

"That is better—that is more like your own self, Philippa. You used to be above all conventionality. I knew that in the depths of your generous heart you would be pleased for your old friend to be happy at last—and I shall be happy, Philippa. You wish me well, do you not?"

Her lips seemed hard and dry as she replied:

"Yes, I wish you well."

"What I wished to consult you about is my marriage. It must not take place here, of course. I understand, and think it only natural, that the duke does not wish to have public attention drawn in any way to Madaline. We all like to keep our little family secrets; consequently I have thought of a plan which I believe will meet all the difficulties of the case."

The pallor of the duchess' face deepened.

"Are you faint or ill, Philippa?" he asked, wondering at her strange appearance.

"No," she replied, "it is only the heat that affects me. Go on with your story, Norman; it interests me."

"That is like my dear old friend Philippa. I though a mar-

riage from here would not do—it would entail publicity and remark; that none of us would care for—besides, there could hardly be a marriage under your auspices during the absence of the duke."

"No, it would hardly be *en régle*," she agreed.

"But," continued Norman, "if Lady Peters would befriend me—if she would go away to some quiet sea-side place, and take Madaline with her—then, at the end of a fortnight, I might join them there, and we could be married, with every due observance of conventionality, but without calling undue public attention to the ceremony. Do you not think that a good plan, Philippa?"

"Yes," she said slowly.

"Look interested in it, or you will mar my happiness. Why, if it were your marriage, Philippa, I should consider every detail of high importance. Do not look cold or indifferent about it."

She roused herself with a shudder.

"I am neither cold nor indifferent," she said—"on the contrary, I am vitally interested. You wish me, of course, to ask Lady Peters if she will do this?"

"Yes, because I know she will refuse you nothing."

"Then that is settled," said the duchess. "There is a pretty, quiet little watering-place called St. Mildred's—I remember hearing Vere speak of it last year—which would meet your wishes, I think, if Lady Peters and Madaline consent."

"I am sure they will consent," put in Lord Arleigh hopefully.

"There is another thing to be thought of," said the duchess—"a *trousseau* for the fair young bride."

"Yes, I know. She will have every fancy gratified after our marriage, but there will not be time for much preparations before it."

"Let me be fairy godmother," said the duchess. "In three weeks from to-day I engage to have such a *trousseau* as has rarely been seen. You can add dresses and ornaments to it afterward."

"You are very good. Do you know," he said, "that it is only now that I begin to recognize my old friend? At first you seemed so unsympathetic, so cold—now you are my sister Philippa, the sharer of my joys and sorrows. We had no secrets when we were children."

"No," she agreed, mournfully, "none."

"And we have none now," he said, with a happy laugh. "How astonished Vere will be when he returns and finds that Madaline is married! And I think that, if it can be all arranged

without any great blow to his family pride, he will not be ill-pleased."

"I should think not," she returned, listlessly.

"And you, Philippa—you will extend to my beloved wife the friendship and affection that you have given to me?"

"Yes," she replied, absently.

"Continue to be her fairy-godmother. There is no friend who can do as you can do. You will be Madaline's sheet-anchor and great hope."

She turned away with a shudder.

"Philippa," he continued, "will you let me send Lady Peters to you now, that I may know as soon as possible whether she consents?"

"You can send her if you will, Norman."

Was it his fancy, or did he really, as he stood at the door, hear a deep, heart-broken sigh? Did her voice, in a sad, low wail, come to him—"Norman, Norman!"

He turned quicky, but she seemed already to have forgotten him, and was looking through the open window.

Was it his fancy again, when the door had closed, or did she really cry—"Norman!" He opened the door quickly.

"Did you call me, Philippa?" he asked.

"No," she replied; and he went away.

"I do not understand it," he thought; "there is something not quite right. Philippa is not like herself."

Then he went in search of Lady Peters, whom he bewildered and astonished by telling her that it lay in her power to make him the happiest of men.

"That is what men say when they make an offer of marriage," she observed; "and I am sure you are not about to make one to me."

"No; but, dear Lady Peters, I want you to help me marry some one else. Will you go to the duchess? She will tell you all about it."

"Why not tell me yourself?" she asked.

"She has better powers of persuasion," he replied, laughingly.

"Then I am afraid, if so much persuasion is required, that something wrong is on the *tapis*," said Lady Peters. "I cannot imagine why men who have beautiful young wives go yachting. It seems to me a terrible mistake."

Lord Arleigh laughed.

"The duke's yachting has very little to do with this matter," he said. "Lady Peters, before you listen to the duchess, let me make one appeal to you. With all my heart I beseech you to grant the favor that she will ask."

He bent his handsome head, and kissed her hand. Tears of emotion rose to the lady's eyes.

"Is it something for you, Lord Arleigh?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, "for my own unworthy self."

"Then I will do it if possible," she replied.

But when the Duchess of Hazlewood had told her what was needed, and had placed the whole matter before her, Lady Peters looked shocked.

"My dear Philippa," she said, "this is terrible. I could not have believed it. She is a lovely, graceful, pure-minded girl, I know; but such a marriage for an Arleigh! I cannot believe it."

"That is unfortunate," said her grace, dryly, "for he seems very much in earnest."

"No money, no rank, no connection, while he is one of the finest matches in England!"

"She is his ideal," was the mocking reply. "It is not for us to point out deficiencies."

"But what will the duke say?" inquired her ladyship, anxiously.

"I do not suppose that he will be very much surprised. Even if he is, he will have had time to recover from his astonishment before he returns. The duke knows that 'beauty leads man at its will.' Few can resist the charm of a pretty face."

"What shall I do?" asked Lady Peters, hopelessly, "what am I to say?"

"Decide for yourself. I decline to offer any opinion. I say simply that if you refuse he will probably ask the favor of some one else."

"But do you advise me to consent, Philippa?" inquired Lady Peters, anxiously.

"I advise you to please yourself. Had he asked a similar favor of me, I might have granted or I might have refused it; I cannot say."

"To think of that simple, fair-faced girl being Lady Arleigh!" exclaimed Lady Peters. "I suppose that I had better consent, or he will do something more desperate. He is terribly in earnest, Philippa."

"He is terribly in love," said the duchess, carelessly; and then Lady Peters decided that she would accede to Lord Arleigh's request.

CHAPTER XXIII.

More than once during the week that ensued after his proposal of marriage to Madaline, Lord Arleigh looked in wonder at the duchess. She seemed so unlike herself—absent, brooding, almost sullen. The smiles, the animation, the vivacity, the wit, the brilliant repartee that had distinguished her had all vanished. More than once he asked her if she was ill; the answer was always "No." More than once he asked her if she was unhappy; the answer was always the same—"No."

"You are miserable because your husband is not here," he said to her one day, compassionately. "If you had known how much you would have missed him, you would not have let him go."

There was a wondrous depth of pain in the dark eyes raised to his.

"I wish he had not gone," she said; "from the very depths of my heart I wish that." Then she seemed to recover her natural gayety. "I do not know, though, why I should have detained him," she said, half laughingly. "He is so fond of yachting."

"You must not lose all your spirits before he returns, Philippa, or he will say we have been but sorry guardians."

"No one has ever found fault with my spirits before," said the duchess. "You are not complimentary, Norman."

"You give me such a strange impression," he observed. "Of course it is highly ridiculous, but if I did not know you as well as I do, I should think that you had something on your mind, some secret that was making you unhappy—that there was a struggle always going on between something you would like to do and something you are unwilling to do. It is an absurd idea, I know, yet it has taken possession of me."

She laughed, but there was little music in the sound.

"What imaginative power you have, Norman! You would make your fortune as a novelist. What can I have to be unhappy about? Should you think that any woman has a lot more brilliant than mine? See how young I am for my position—how entirely I have my own way! Could any one, do you think, be more happy than I?"

"No, perhaps not," he replied.

So the week passed, and at the end of it Lady Peters went with Madaline to St. Mildred's. At first the former had been unwilling to go—it had seemed to her a terrible *mésalliance;* but, woman-like, she had grown interested in the love-story—

she had learned to understand the passionate love that Lord Arleigh had for his fair-haired bride. A breath of her own youth swept over her as she watched them.

It might be a *mésalliance*, a bad match, but it was decidedly a case of true love, of the truest love she had ever witnessed; so that her dislike to the task before her melted away.

After all, Lord Arleigh had a perfect right to please himself—to do as he would; if he did not think Madaline's birth placed her greatly beneath him, no one else need suggest such a thing. From being a violent opponent of the marriage, Lady Peters became one of its most strenuous supporters. So they went away to St. Mildred's, where the great tragedy of Madaline's life was to begin.

On the morning that she went way, the duchess sent for her to her room. She told her all that she intended doing as regarded the elaborate and magnificent *trousseau* preparing for her. Madaline was overwhelmed.

"You are too good to me," she said—"you spoil me. How am I to thank you?"

"Your wedding-dress—plain, simple, but rich, to suit the occasion—will be sent to St. Mildred's," said the duchess—"also a handsome traveling costume; but all the rest of the packages can be sent to Beechgrove. You will need them only there."

Madaline kissed the hand extended to her.

"I shall never know how to thank you," she said.

A peculiar smile came over the darkly-beautiful face.

"I think you will," returned the duchess "I can imagine what blessings you will some day invoke on my name."

Then she withdrew her hand suddenly from the touch of the pure sweet lips.

"Good-by, Madaline," she said; and it was long before the young girl saw the fair face of the duchess again.

Just as she was quitting the room Philippa placed a packet in her hand.

"You will carefully observe the directions given in this?" she said; and Madaline promised to do so.

The time at St. Mildred's soon passed. It was a quiet, picturesque village, standing at the foot of a green hill facing the bay. There was little to be seen, except the shining sea and the blue sky. An old church, called St. Mildred's, stood on the hill-top. Few strangers ever visited the little watering-place. The residents were people who preferred quiet and beautiful scenery to everything else. There was a hotel, called the Queen's, where the few strangers that came mostly resided; and just facing the sea stood a newly-built terrace of houses called Sea View, where other visitors also sojourned.

It was just the place for lovers' dreams—a shining sea, golden

sands, white cliffs with little nooks and bays, pretty and shaded walks on the hill-top.

Madaline's great happiness was delightful to see. The fair face grew radiant in its loveliness; the blue eyes shone brightly. There was the delight, too, every day of inspecting the parcels that arrived one after the other; but the greatest pleasure of all was afforded by the wedding-dress. It was plain, simple, yet, in its way, a work of art—a rich white silk with little lace or trimming, yet looking so like a wedding-dress that no one could mistake it. There were snowy gloves and shoes—in fact everything was perfect, selected by no common taste, the gift of no illiberal hand. Was it foolish of her to kiss the white folds while the tears filled her eyes, and to think of herself that she was the happiest creature under the sun? Was it foolish of her to touch the pretty bridal robes with soft, caressing fingers, as though they were some living thing that she loved—to place them where the sunbeams fell on them, to admire them in every different fold and arrangement?

Then the eventful day came—Lord Arleigh and Madaline were to be married at an early hour.

"Not," said Lord Arleigh, proudly, "that there is any need for concealment—why should there be?—but you see, Lady Peters, if it were known that it was my wedding-day, I have so many friends, so many relatives, that privacy would be impossible for us; therefore the world has not been enlightened as to when I intended to claim my darling for my own."

"It is a strange marriage for an Arleigh," observed Lady Peters—"the first of its kind, I am sure. But I think you are right—your plan is wise."

All the outward show made at the wedding consisted in the rapid driving of a carriage from the hotel to the church—a carriage containing two ladies—one young, fair, charming as a spring morning, the other older, graver, and more sedate.

The young girl was fair and sweet, her golden hair shining through the marriage vail, her blue eyes wet with unshed tears, her face flushed with daintiest rose-leaf bloom.

It was a pleasant spectacle to see the dark, handsome face of her lover as he greeted her, the love that shone in his eyes, the pride of his manner, as though he would place her before the whole world, and defy it to produce one so graceful or so fair. Lady Peters' face softened and her heart beat as she walked up to the altar with them. This was true love.

So the grand old words of the marriage-service were pronounced—they were promised to each other for better for worse, for weal for woe—never to part until death parted them—to be each the other's world.

It was the very morning for a bride. Heaven and earth smiled

their brightest, the sunshine was golden, the autumn flowers bloomed fair, the autumn foliage had assumed its rich hues of crimson and of burnished gold; there was a bright light over the sea and the hill-tops.

Only one little *contretemps* happened at the wedding. Madaline smiled at it. Lord Arleigh was too happy even to notice it, but Lady Peters grew pale at the occurrence; for, according to her old-fashioned ideas, it augured ill.

Just as Lord Arleigh was putting the ring on the finger of his fair young bride, it slipped and fell to the ground. The church was an old-fashioned one, and there were graves and vaults all down the aisle. Away rolled the little golden ring, and when Lord Arleigh stooped down he could not see it. He was for some minutes searching for it, and then he found it—it had rolled into the hollow of a large letter on one of the level gravestones.

Involuntarily he kissed it as he lifted it from the ground; it was too cruel for anything belonging to that fair young bride to have been brought into contact with death. Lady Peters noted the little incident with a shudder, Madaline merely smiled. Then the ceremony was over—Lord Arleigh and Madaline were man and wife. It seemed to him that the whole world around him was transformed.

They walked out of the church together, and when they stood in the sunlight he turned to her.

"My darling, my wife," he said, in an impassioned voice, "may Heaven send to us a life bright as this sunshine, love as pure—life and death together! I pray Heaven that no deeper cloud may come over our lives than there is now in the sky above us."

These words were spoken at only eleven in the morning. If he had known all that he would have to suffer before eleven at night, Lord Arleigh, with all his bravery, all his chivalry, would have been ready to fling himself from the green hill-top into the shimmering sea.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was the custom of the Arleighs to spend their honey-moon at home; they had never fallen into the habit of making themselves uncomfortable abroad. The proper place, they considered, for a man to take his young wife to was home; the first Lord Arleigh had done so, and each lord had followed this sensible example. Norman, Lord Arleigh, had not dreamed of making any change. True, he had planned with his fair young bride that when the autumn months had passed away they

would go abroad, and not spend the winter in cold, foggy England. They had talked of the cities they would visit—and Madaline's sweet eyes had grown brighter with happy thoughts. But that was not to be yet; they were to go home first, and when they had learned something of what home-life would be together, then they could go abroad.

Lady Peters went back to Verdun Royal on the same morning; her task ended with the marriage. She took back with her innumerable messages for the duchess. As she stood at the carriage-door, she—so little given to demonstration—took the young wife into her arms.

"Good-by, Madaline—or I should say now, Lady Arleigh—good-by, and may Heaven bless you! I did not love you at first, my dear, and I thought my old friend was doing a foolish thing; but now I love you with all my heart; you are so fair and wise, so sweet and pure, that in making you his wife he has chosen more judiciously than if he had married the daughter of a noble house. That is my tribute to you, Madaline; and to it I add, may Heaven bless you, and send you a happy life!"

Then they parted; but, as she went home through all the glory of the sunlit day, Lady Peters did not feel quite at ease.

"I wish," she said to herself, "that he had not dropped the wedding-ring; it has made me feel uncomfortable."

Bride and bridegroom had one of the blithest, happiest journeys ever made. What cloud could rise in such a sky as theirs. They were blessed with youth, beauty, health; there had been no one to raise the least opposition to their marriage; before them stretched a long golden future.

The carriage met them at the station; it was then three in the afternoon, and the day continued fair.

"We will have a long drive through the park, Madaline," said Lord Arleigh. "You will like to see your new home."

So, instead of going direct to the mansion, they turned off from the main avenue to make a tour of the park.

"Now I understand why this place is called Beechgrove," said Madaline, suddenly. "I have never seen such trees in my life."

She spoke truly. Giant beech-trees spread out their huge boughs on all sides. They were trees of which any man would have been proud, because of their beauty and magnificence. Presently from between the trees she saw the mansion itself. Lord Arleigh touched his young wife's arm gently.

"My darling," he said, "that is home."

Her face flushed, her eyes brightened, the sensitive lips quivered.

"Home!" she repeated. "How sweet the word sounds to me!" With a tremulous smile she raised her face to his. "Nor-

man," she said, "do you know that I feel very much as Lady Burleigh, the wife of Lord Burleigh, of Stamford-town, must have felt."

"But you, Madaline," he laughed, "are not quite the simple maiden—he wooed and won. You have the high-bred grace of a lady—nothing could rob you of that."

"She must have been lovely and graceful to have won Lord Burleigh," she remarked.

"Perhaps so, but not like you, Madaline—there has never been any one quite like you. I shall feel tempted to call you 'Lady Burleigh.' Here we are at home; and, oh, my wife, my darling, how sweet the coming home is!"

The carriage stopped at the grand entrance. Wishing to spare his young wife all fatigue and embarrassment, Lord Arleigh had not dispatched the news of his marriage home, so that no one at Beechgrove expected to see Lady Arleigh. He sent at once for the housekeeper, a tall, stately dame, who came into the dining-room, looking in unutterable amazement at the beautiful, blushing young face.

"Mrs. Chatterton," he said, "I wish to introduce you to my wife, Lady Arleigh."

The stately dame curtesied almost to the ground.

"Welcome home, my lady," she said, deferentially. "If I had known that your ladyship was expected I would have made more befitting preparations."

"Nothing could be better—you have everything in admirable order," responded Lord Arleigh, kindly.

Then the housekeeper turned with a bow to her master.

"I did not know that you were married, my lord," she said.

"No, Mrs. Chatterton; for reasons of my own, I hurried on my marriage. No one shall lose by the hurry, though"—which she knew meant a promise of handsome bounty.

Presently the housekeeper went with Lady Arleigh to her room.

The grandeur and magnificence of the house almost startled her. She felt more like Lady Burleigh than ever, as she went up the broad marble staircase and saw the long corridors with the multitude of rooms.

"His lordship wrote to tell me to have all the rooms in the western wing ready," said Mrs. Chatterton; "but he did not tell why. They are splendid rooms, my lady—large, bright and cheerful. They look over the beautiful beeches in the park, from which the place takes its name. Of course you will have what is called Lady Arleigh's suite."

As she spoke Mrs. Chatterton threw open the door, and Lady Arleigh saw the most magnificent rooms she had ever beheld in her life—a *boudoir* all blue silk and white lace, a spacious sleep-

ing-chamber daintily hung with pink satin, a dressing-room that was a marvel of elegance, and a small library, all fitted with the greatest luxury.

"This is the finest suite of rooms in the house," said the housekeeper; "they are always kept for the use of the mistress of Beechgrove. Has your ladyship brought your maid?"

"No," replied Lady Arleigh; "the fact is I have not chosen one. The Duchess of Hazlewood promised to find one for me."

The illustrious name pleased the housekeeper. She had felt puzzled at the quiet marriage, and the sudden home-coming. If the new mistress of Beechgrove was an intimate friend of her Grace of Hazlewood's, as her words seemed to imply, then all must be well.

When Lady Arleigh had changed her traveling-dress, she went down-stairs. Her young husband looked up in a rapture of delight.

"Oh, Madaline," he said, "how long have you been away from me? It seems like a hundred hours, yet I do not suppose it has been one. And how fair you look, my love! That cloudy white robe suits your golden hair and your sweet face, which has the same soft, sweet expression as when I saw you first; and those pretty shoulders of yours gleam like polished marble through the lace. No dress could be more coquettish or prettier."

The wide hanging sleeves were fastened back from the shoulders with buttons of pearl, leaving the white, rounded arms bare; a bracelet of pearls—Lady Peters' gift—was clasped round the graceful neck; the waves of golden hair, half loose, half carelessly fastened, were like a crown on the beautiful head.

"I am proud of my wife," he said. "I know that no fairer Lady Arleigh has ever been at Beechgrove. When we have dined, Madaline, I will take you to the picture-gallery, and introduce you to my ancestors and ancestresses."

A *récherché* little dinner had been hastily prepared, and was served in the grand dining-room. Madaline's eyes ached with the dazzle of silver plate, the ornaments and magnificence of the room.

"Shall I ever grow accustomed to all this?" she asked herself. "Shall I ever learn to look upon it as my own? I am indeed bewildered."

Yet her husband admired her perfect grace and self-possession. She might have been mistress of Beechgrove all her life for any evidence she gave to the contrary. His pride in her increased every moment; there was no one like her.

"I have never really known what 'home' meant before, Madaline," he said. "Imagine sitting opposite to a beautiful

vision, knowing all the time that it is your wife. My own wife —there is magic in the words."

And she, in her sweet humility, wondered why Heaven had so richly blessed her, and what she had done that the great, passionate love of this noble man should be hers. When dinner was ended he asked her if she was tired.

"No," she answered, laughingly; "I have never felt less fatigued."

"Then I should like to show you over the house," he said—"my dear old home. I am so proud of it, Madaline; you understand what I mean—proud of its beauty; its antiquity—proud that no shadow of disgrace has ever rested on it. To others these are simply ancient gray walls; to me they represent the honor, the stainless repute, the unshadowed dignity of my race. People may sneer if they will, but to me there seems nothing so sacred as love of race—jealousy of a stainless name."

"I can understand and sympathize with you," she said, "although the feeling is strange to me."

"Not quite strange, Madaline. Your mother had a name, dear, entitled to all respect. Now come with me, and I will introduce you to the long line of the Ladies Arleigh."

They went together to the picture-gallery, and as they passed through the hall Madaline heard the great clock chiming.

"Ah, Norman," she said, listening to the chimes, "how much may happen in one day, however short that day may be."

CHAPTER XXV.

The picture-gallery was one of the chief attractions of Beechgrove; like the grand old trees, it had been the work of generations. The Arleighs had always been great patrons of the fine arts; many a lord of Beechgrove had expended what was a handsome fortune in the purchase of pictures. The gallery itself was built on a peculiar principal; it went round the whole of the house, extending from the eastern to the western wing—it was wide, lofty, well-lighted, and the pictures were well hung. In wet weather the ladies of the house used it as a promenade. It was filled with art-treasures of all kinds, the accumulation of many generations. From between the crimson velvet hangings white marble statues gleamed, copies of the world's great masterpieces; there were also more modern works of art. The floor was of the most exquisite parquetry; the seats and lounges were soft and luxurious; in the great windows east and west there stood a small fountain, and the ripple of the water sounded like

music in the quietude of the gallery. One portion of it was devoted entirely to family portraits. They were a wonderful collection, perhaps one of the most characteristic in England.

Lord Arleigh and his young wife walked through the gallery.

"I thought the gallery at Verdun Royal the finest in the world," she said; "it is nothing compared to this."

"And this," he returned, "is small, compared with the great European galleries."

"They belong to nations; this belongs to an individual," she said—"there is a difference."

Holding her hand in his, he led her to the long line of fair-faced women. As she stood, the light from the setting sun falling on her fair face and golden hair, he said to himself that he had no picture in his gallery one-half so exquisite.

"Now," he said, "let me introduce you to the ladies of my race."

At that moment the sunbeams that had been shining on the wall died out suddenly. She looked up, half laughingly.

"I think the ladies of your race are frowning on me, Norman," she said.

"Hardly that; if they could but step down from their frames, what a stately company they would make to welcome you!"

And forthwith he proceeded to narrate their various histories.

"This resolute woman," he said, "with the firm lips and strong, noble face, lived in the time of the Roses; she held this old hall against her foes for three whole weeks, until the siege was raised, and the enemy retired discomfited."

"She was a brave woman," remarked Lady Arleigh.

"This was a heroine," he went on—"Lady Alicia Arleigh; she would not leave London when the terrible plague raged there. It is supposed that she saved numberless lives; she devoted herself to the nursing of the sick, and when all the fright and fear had abated, she found herself laden with blessings, and her name honored throughout the land. This is Lady Lola, who in time of riot went out unattended, unarmed, quite alone, and spoke to three or four hundred of the roughest men in the country; they had come, in the absence of her husband, to sack and pillage the Hall—they marched back again, leaving it untouched. This, Lady Constance, is a lineal descendant of Lady Nethsdale—the brave Lady Nethsdale."

She clung to his arm as she stood there.

"Oh, Norman," she said, "do you mean that my portrait, too, will hang here?"

"I hope so, my darling, very soon."

"But how can I have a place among all these fair and noble women," she asked, with sad humility—"I whose ancestors have done nothing to deserve merit or praise? Why, Norman,

in the long years to come, when some Lord Arleigh brings home his wife, as you have brought me, and they stand together before my picture as I stand before these, the young wife will ask: 'Who was this?' and the answer will be: 'Lady Madaline Arleigh.' She will ask again: 'Who was she?' And what will the answer be? 'She was no one of importance; she had neither money, rank, nor aught else.' "

He looked at the bent face near him.

"Nay, my darling, not so. That Lord Arleigh will be able to answer: 'She was the flower of the race; she was famed for her pure, gentle life, and the good example she gave to all around her; she was beloved by rich and poor.' That is what will be said of you, my Madaline."

"Heaven make me worthy!" she said, humbly. And then they came to a picture that seemed to strike her.

"Norman," she said, "that face is like the Duchess of Hazlewood's."

"Do you think so, darling? Well, there is perhaps a faint resemblance."

"It lies in the brow and in the chin," she said. "How beautiful the duchess is!" she continued. "I have often looked at her till her face seemed to dazzle me."

"I know some one who is far more beautiful in my eyes," he returned.

"Norman," she said, half hesitatingly, "do you know one thing that I have thought so strange?"

"No, I have not been trusted with many of your thoughts yet," he returned.

"I have wondered so often why you never fell in love with the duchess."

"Fate had something better in store for me," he said, laughing.

She looked surprised.

"You cannot mean that you really think I am better than she is, Norman?"

"I do think it, darling; ten thousand times better—ten thousand times fairer in my eyes."

"Norman," she said, a sudden gleam of memory brightening her face; "I had almost forgotten—the duchess gave me this for you; I was to be sure to give it to you before the sun set on our wedding-day."

She held out a white packet sealed securely, and he took it wonderingly. He tore off the outer cover, and saw, written on the envelope:

"A wedding present from Philippa, Duchess of Hazlewood, to Lord Arleigh. To be read alone on his wedding-day."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Lord Arleigh stared at the packet which his wife had given him, and again and again read the words that were inscribed on it: "A wedding present from Philippa, Duchess of Hazlewood, to Lord Arleigh. To be read alone on his wedding-day." What could it mean? Philippa at times took strange caprices into her head. This seemed to be one of the strangest. He held the letter in his hand, a strange presentiment of evil creeping over him which he could not account for. From the envelope came a sweet scent, which the duchess always used. It was so familiar to him that for a few minutes it brought her vividly before him—he could have fancied her standing near him. Then he remembered the strange words: "To be read alone." What could that mean? That the letter contained something that his young wife must not see or hear.

He looked at her. She had seemingly forgotten all about the packet, and stood now, with a smile on her face, before one of the finest pictures in the gallery, wrapt in a dream of delight. There could not be anything in the letter affecting her. Still, as Philippa had written so pointedly, it would be better perhaps for him to heed her words.

"Madaline, my darling," he said, sinking on to an ottoman, "you have taken no tea. You would like some. Leave me here alone for half an hour. I want to think."

She did what she had never done voluntarily before. She went up to him, and clasped her arms round his neck. She bent her blushing face over his, and the caress surprised as much as it delighted him—she was so shyly demonstrative.

"What are you going to think about, Norman? Will it be of me?"

"Of whom else should I think on my wedding-day, if not of my wife?" he asked.

"I should be jealous if your thoughts went anywhere else," replied Madaline. "There is a daring speech, Norman. I never thought I should make such a one."

"Your daring is very delightful, Madaline; let me hear more of it."

She laughed the low, happy, contented laugh that sounded like sweetest music in his ears.

"I will dare to say something else, Norman, if you will promise not to think it uncalled for. I am very happy, my darling husband—I love you very much, and I thank you for your love."

"Still better," he said, kissing the beautiful, blushing face. "Now go, Madaline. I understand the feminine liking for a cup of tea."

"Shall I send one to you?" she asked.

"No," he replied, laughingly. "You may teach me to care about tea in time. I do not yet."

He was still holding the letter in his hand, and the faint perfume was like a message from Philippa, reminding him that the missive was still unread.

"I shall not be long," said Madaline. She saw that for some reason or other he wanted to be alone.

"You will find me here," he returned. "This is a favorite nook of mine. I shall not leave it until you return."

The nook was a deep bay window from which there was a magnificent view of the famous beeches. Soft Turkish cushions and velvet lounges filled it, and near it hung one of Titian's most gorgeous pictures—a dark-eyed woman with a ruby necklace. The sun's declining rays falling on the rubies, made them appear like drops of blood. It was a grand picture, one that had been bought by the lords of Beechgrove, and the present Lord Arleigh took great delight in it.

He watched the long folds of Madaline's white dress, as she passed along the gallery, and then the hangings fell behind her. Once more he held up the packet.

"A wedding present from Philippa, Duchess of Hazlewood, to Lord Arleigh."

Whatever mystery it contained should be solved at once. He broke the seal; the envelope contained a closely-written epistle. He looked at it in wonder. What could Philippa have to write to him about? The letter began as follows:

"A wedding present from Philippa, Duchess of Hazlewood, to Norman, Lord Arleigh. You will ask what it is? My answer is, my revenge—well planned, patiently awaited.

"You have read the lines:

> " 'Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.'

They are true. Fire, fury, and hatred rage now in my heart as I write this to you. You have scorned me--this is my revenge. I am a proud woman—I have lowered my pride to you. My lips have never willfully uttered a false word; still they have lied to you. I loved you once, Norman, and on the day my love died I knew that nothing could arise from its ashes. I loved you with a love passing that of most women; and it was not all my fault. I was taught to love you—the earliest memory of my life is having been taught to love you.

"You remember, too. It may have been injudicious, impru-

dent, foolish, yet while I was taught to think, to read, to sing, I was also taught to consider myself your 'little wife.' Hundreds of times have you given me that name, while we walked together as children—you with your arm about my neck, I proud of being called your 'little wife.'

"As a child, I loved you better than anything else in the wide world—better than my mother, my home, my friends; and my love grew with my growth. I prided myself on my unbroken troth to you. I earned the repute of being cold and heartless, because I could think of no one but you. No compliments pleased me, no praise flattered me; I studied, learned, cultivated every gift Heaven had given me—all for your sake. I thought of no future, but with you, no life but with you, no love but for you; I had no dreams apart from you. I was proud when they talked of my beauty; that you should have a fair wife delighted me.

"When you returned home I quite expected that you were coming to claim me as your wife—I thought that was what brought you to England. I remember the day you came. Ah, well, revenge helps me to live, or I should die! The first tones of your voice, the first clasp of your hand, the first look of your eyes chilled me with sorrow and disappointment. Yet I hoped against hope. I thought you were shy, perhaps more reserved than of yore. I thought everything and anything except that you had ceased to love me; I would have believed anything rather than that you were not going to fulfill our ancient contract, and make me your wife. I tried to make you talk of old times—you were unwilling; you seemed confused, embarrassed; I read all those signs aright; still I hoped against hope. I tried to win you—I tried all that love, patience, gentleness, and consideration could do.

"What women bear, and yet live on! Do you know that every moment of that time was full of deadly torture to me, deadly anguish? Ah, me, the very memory of it distresses me! Every one spoke to me as though our engagement was a certainty, and our marriage settled. Yet to me there came, very slowly, the awful conviction that you had ignored, or had forgotten the old ties. I fought against that conviction. I would not entertain it. Then came for me the fatal day when I heard you tell the Duchess of Aytoun that you had never seen the woman you would care to make your wife. I heard your confession, but would not give in; I clung to the idea of winning your love, even after I had hoped against hope, and tried to make you care for me. At last came the night out on the balcony, when I resolved to risk all, to ask you for your love—do you remember it? You were advocating the cause of another; I asked you why you did not speak for yourself. You must

have known that my woman's heart was on fire—you must have seen that my whole soul was in my speech, yet you told me in cold, well-chosen words that you had only a brother's affection for me. On that night, for the first time, I realized the truth that, come what might, you would never love me—that you had no idea of carrying out the old contract—that your interest in me was simply a kindly, friendly one. On that night, when I realized that truth, the better part of me died; my love—the love of my life—died; my hopes—the life-long hopes—died; the best, truest, noblest part of me died.

"When you had gone away, when I was left alone, I fell on my knees and swore to be revenged. I vowed vengeance against you, no matter what it might cost. Again let me quote to you the lines:

"'Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.'

You scorned me—you must suffer for it. I swore to be revenged, but how was I to accomplish my desire? I could not see any way in which it was possible for me to make you suffer. I could not touch your heart, your affections, your fortune. The only thing that I could touch was your pride. Through your pride, your keen sensitiveness I decided to stab you; and I have succeeded! I recovered my courage and my pride together, made you believe that all that had passed had been a jest, and then I told you that I was going to marry the duke.

"I will say no more of my love or my sorrow. I lived only for vengeance, but how my object was to be effected I could not tell. I thought of many plans, they were all worthless—they could not hurt you as you had hurt me. At last, one day, quite accidentally I took up 'The Lady of Lyons,' and read it through. That gave me an idea of what my revenge should be like. Do you begin to suspect what this present is that the Duchess of Hazlewood intends making to you on your wedding-day?"

As he read on his face grew pale. What could it mean—this reference to "The Lady of Lyons?" That was the story of a deceitful marriage—surely all unlike his own.

"You are wondering. Turn the page and you shall read that, when an idea once possesses a woman's mind, she has no rest until it is carried out. I had none. My vengeance was mapped out for me—it merely required filling in. Let me show you how it was filled up—how I have lied to you, who to another have never uttered a false word.

"Years ago we had a maid whom my mother liked very much. She was gentle, well-mannered, and well-bred for her station in life. She left us, and went to some other part of England. She

married badly—a handsome, reckless ne'er-do-well, who led her a most wretched life.

"I know not, and care nothing for the story of her married life, her rights and wrongs. How she becomes of interest to you lies in the fact that shortly after my marriage she called to see me and ask my aid. She had been compelled to give up her home in the country and come to London, where, with her husband and child, she was living in poverty and misery. While she was talking to me the duke came in. I think her patient face interested him. He listened to her story, and promised to do something for her husband. You will wonder how this story of Margaret Dornham concerns you. Read on. You will know in time.

"My husband having promised to assist this man, sent for him to the house; and the result of that visit was that the man, seeing a quantity of plate about, resolved upon helping himself to a portion of it. To make my story short, he was caught, after having broken into the house, packed up a large parcel of plate, and filled his pockets with some of my most valuable jewels. There was no help for it but to prosecute him, and his sentence was, under the circumstances, none too heavy, being ten years' penal servitude.

"Afterward I went to see his wife Margaret, and found her in desperate circumstances; yet she had one ornament in her house—a beautiful young girl, her daughter, so fair of face that she dazzled me. The moment I saw her I thought of your description of your ideal—eyes like blue hyacinths, and hair of gold. Forthwith a plan entered my mind which I have most successfully carried out.

"I asked for the girl's name, and was told that it was Madaline—an uncommon name for one of her class—but the mother had lived among well-to-do people, and had caught some of their ideas. I looked at the girl—her face was fair, sweet, pure. I felt the power of its beauty, and only wondered that she should belong to such people at all; her hands were white and shapely as my own, her figure was slender and graceful. I began to talk to her, and found her well educated, refined, intelligent—all, in fact, that one could wish.

"Little by little their story came out—it was one of a mother's pride and glory in her only child. She worshiped her—literally worshiped her. She had not filled the girl's mind with any nonsensical idea about being a lady, but she had denied herself everything in order that Madaline might be well educated. For many years Madaline had been what is called a governess-pupil in a most excellent school. 'Let me die when I may,' said the poor, proud mother, 'I shall leave Madaline with a fortune in her own hands; her education will always be a fortune to her.'

"I asked her one day if she would let me take Madaline home with me for a few hours; she seemed delighted, and consented at once. I took the girl home, and with my own hands dressed her in one of my most becoming toilets. Her beauty was something marvelous. She seemed to gain both grace and dignity in her new attire. Shortly afterward, with her mother's permission, I sent her for six months to one of the most fashionable schools in Paris. The change wrought in her was magical; she learned as much in that time as some girls would have learned in a couple of years. Every little grace of manner seemed to come naturally to her; she acquired a tone that twenty years spent in the best of society does not give to some. Then I persuaded Vere, my husband, to take me to Paris for a few days, telling him I wanted to see the daughter of an old friend, who was at school there. In telling him that I did not speak falsely—Madaline's mother had been an old friend of mine. Then I told him that my whim was to bring Madaline home and make a companion of her; he allowed me to do just as I pleased, asking no questions about her parents, or anything else. I do not believe it ever occurred to him as strange that the name of my *protégée* and of the man who had robbed him was the same—indeed, he seemed to have forgotten all about the robbery. So I brought Madaline home to Vere Court, and then to London, where I knew that you would see her. My husband never asked any questions about her; he made no objection, no remark—everything that I did was always well done in his eyes.

"But you will understand clearly that to you I told a lie when I said that Madaline's mother was a poor relative of the duke's—you know now what relationship there is between them. Even Lady Peters does not know the truth. She fancies that Madaline is the daughter of some friend of mine who, having fallen on evil days, has been glad to send her to me.

"Knowing you well, Norman, the accomplishment of my scheme was not difficult. If I had brought Madaline to you and introduced her, you might not have been charmed; the air of mystery about her attracted you. My warning against your caring for her would, I knew, also help to allure you. I was right in every way. I saw that you fell in love with her at once—the first moment you saw her—and then I knew my revenge was secured.

"I bought my husband the yacht on purpose that he might go away and leave me to work out my plans. I knew that he could not resist the temptation I offered. I knew also that if he remained in England he would want to know all about Madaline before he allowed you to marry her. If the marriage was to take place at all, it must be during his absence. You seemed,

of your own free will, Norman, to fall naturally into the web woven for you.

"I write easily, but I found it hard to be wicked—hard to see my lost love, my dear old companion, drift on to his ruin.

"More than once I paused, longing to save you; more than once I drew back, longing to tell you all. But the spirit of revenge within me was stronger than myself—my love had turned to hate. Yet I could not quite hate you, Norman—not quite. Once, when you appealed to my old friendship, when you told me of your plans, I almost gave way. 'Norman!' I cried, as you were leaving me; but when you turned again I was dumb.

"So I have taken my revenge. I, Philippa, Duchess of Hazlewood, on this your wedding-day, reveal to you the first stain on the name of Arleigh—unvail the first blot on one of the noblest escutcheons in the land. You have married not only a low-born girl, but the daughter of a felon—a felon's daughter is mistress of proud Beechwood! You who scorned Philippa L'Estrange, who had the cruelty to refuse the love of a woman who loved you—you who looked for your ideal in the clouds, have found it near a prison cell! The daughter of a felon will be the mistress of the grand old house where some of the noblest ladies of the land have ruled - the daughter of a felon will be mother of the heirs of Arleigh. Could I have planned, prayed for, hoped for, longed for a sweeter revenge?

"I am indifferent as to what you may do in return. I have lived for my revenge, and now that I have tasted it life is indifferent to me. You will, of course, write to complain to the duke, and he, with his honest indignation justly aroused, will perhaps refuse to see me again. I care not; my interest in life ended when my love died.

"Let me add one thing more. Madaline herself has been deceived. I told her that you knew all her history, that I had kept nothing from you, and that you loved her in spite of it, but that she was never to mention it to you."

He read the letter with a burning flush on his face, which afterward grew white as with the pallor of death; a red mist was before his eyes, the sound of surging waters in his ears, his heart beat loud and fast. Could it be true—oh, merciful Heaven, could it be true? At first he had a wild hope that it was a cruel jest that Philippa was playing with him on his wedding-day. It could not be true—his whole soul rose in rebellion against it. Heaven was too just, too merciful—it could not be. It was a jest. He drew his breath with a long quivering sigh—his lips trembled; it was simply a jest to frighten him on his wedding-day.

Then, one by one—slowly, sadly, surely—a whole host of cir-

cumstances returned to his mind, making confirmation strong. He remembered well—only too well—the scene in the balcony. He remembered the pale starlight, the light scarf thrown over Philippa's shoulders, even the very perfume that came from the flowers in her hair; he remembered how her voice had trembled, how her face had shown in the faint evening light. When she had quoted the words of *Priscilla*, the loveliest maiden of Plymouth, she had meant them as applicable to her own case—"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" They came back to him with a fierce, hissing sound, mocking his despair. She had loved him through all—this proud, beautiful, brilliant woman for whom men of highest rank had sighed in vain. And, knowing her pride, her haughtiness, he could guess exactly what her love had cost her, and that all that followed had been a mockery. On that night her love had changed to hate. On that night she had planned this terrible revenge. Her offering of friendship had been a blind. He thought to himself that he had been foolish not to see it. A thousand circumstances presented themselves to his mind. This, then, was why Madaline had so persistently—and, to his mind, so strangely—refused his love. This was why she had talked incessantly of the distance between them—of her own unworthiness to be his wife. He had thought that she alluded merely to her poverty, whereas it was her birth and parentage she referred to.

How cleverly, how cruelly Philippa had deceived them both—Philippa, his old friend and companion, his sister in all but name! He could see now a thousand instances in which Madaline and himself had played at cross purposes—a thousand instances in which the poor girl had alluded to her parent's sin, and he had thought she was speaking of her poverty. It was a cruel vengeance, for, before he had read the letter through, he knew that if the story were correct, she could be his wife in name only—that they must part. Poverty, obscurity, seemed as nothing now—but crime? Oh, Heaven, that his name and race should be so dishonored! If he had known the real truth, he would have died rather than have uttered one word of love to her.

The daughter of a felon—and he had brought her to Beechgrove as successor to a roll of noble women, each one of whom had been of noble birth! She was the daughter of a felon—no matter how fair, how graceful, how pure. For the first time the glory of Beechgrove was tarnished. But it would not be for long—it could not be for long; she must not remain. The daughter of a felon to be the mother of his children—ah, no, not if he went childless to the grave! Better that his name were extinct, better that the race of Arleigh should die out, than that his children should be pointed at as children with tainted blood!

It could never be. He would expect the dead and gone Arleighs to rise from their graves in utter horror, he would expect some terrible curse to fall on him, were so terrible a desecration to happen. They must part. The girl he loved with all the passionate love of his heart, the fair young wife whom he worshiped, must go from him, and he must see her no more. She must be his wife in name only.

He was young, and he loved her very dearly. His head fell forward on his breast, and as bitter a sob as ever left man's lips died on his. His wife in name only! The sweet face, the tender lips were not for him—yet he loved her with the whole passion and force of his soul. Then he raised his head—for he heard a sound, and knew that she was returning. Great drops of anguish fell from his brow—over his handsome face had come a terrible change; it had grown fierce with pain, haggard with despair, white with sorrow.

Looking up, he saw her—she was at the other end of the gallery; he saw the tall, slender figure and the sweeping dress—he saw the white arms with their graceful contour, the golden hair, the radiant face—and he groaned aloud; he saw her looking up at the pictures as she passed slowly along—the ancestral Arleighs of whom he was so proud. If they could have spoken, those noble women, what would they have said to this daughter of a felon?

She paused for a few minutes to look up at her favorite, Lady Alicia, and then she came up to him and stood before him in all the grace of her delicate loveliness, in all the pride of her dainty beauty. She was looking at the gorgeous Titian near him.

"Norman," she said, "the sun has turned those rubies into drops of blood—they looked almost terrible on the white throat. What a strange picture! What a tragical face!"

Suddenly with outstretched arms she fell on her knees at his side.

"Oh, my darling, what has happened? What is the matter?"

She had been away from him only half an hour, yet it seemed to him ages since he had watched her leave the gallery with a smile on her lips.

"What is it, my darling?" she cried again. "Dear Norman, you look as though the shadow of death had passed over you. What is it?"

In another moment she had flung herself on his breast, clasped her arms round his neck, and was kissing his pale changed face as she had never done before.

"Norman, my darling husband, you are ill," she said—"ill, and you will not tell me. That is why you sent me away."

He tried to unclasp her arms, but she clung the more closely to him.

"You shall not send me away. You wish to suffer in silence! Oh, my darling, my husband, do you forget that I am your wife, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health? You shall not suffer without my knowledge."

"I am not ill, Madaline," he said, with a low moan. "It is not that."

"Then something has happened—you have been frightened."

He unclasped her arms from his neck—their caress was a torture to him.

"My poor darling, my poor wife, it is far worse than that. No man has ever seen a more ghastly specter than I have seen of death in life."

She looked round in quick alarm.

"A specter!" she cried fearfully; and then something strange in his face attracted her attention. She looked at him. "Norman," she said, slowly, "is it—is it something about me?"

How was he to tell her? He felt that it would be easier to take her out into the glorious light of the sunset and slay her than kill her with the cruel words that he must speak. How was he to tell her? No physical torture could be so great as that which he must inflict; yet he would have given his life to save her from pain.

"It is—I am quite sure," she declared, slowly—"something about me. Oh, Norman, what is it? I have not been away from you long. Yet no change from fairest day to darkest night could be so great as the change in you since I left you. You will not tell me what it is—you have taken my arms from your neck—you do not love me!"

"Do not torture me, Madaline," he said. "I am almost mad. I cannot bear much more."

"But what is it? What have I done? I who you send from you now am the same Madaline whom you married this morning—whom you kissed half an hour since. Norman, I begin to think that I am in a terrible dream."

"I would to Heaven it were a dream. I am unnerved—unmanned—I have lost my strength, my courage, my patience, my hope. Oh, Madaline, how can I tell you?"

The sight of his terrible agitation seemed to calm her; she took his hand in hers.

"Do not think of me," she said—"think of yourself. I can bear what you can bear. Let me share your trouble, whatever it may be, my husband."

He looked at the sweet, pleading face. How could he dash the light and brightness from it? How could he slay her with the cruel story he had to tell. Then, in a low, hoarse voice, he said:

"You must know all, and I cannot say it. Read this letter, Madaline, and then you will understand."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Slowly, wonderingly, Lady Arleigh took the Duchess of Hazlewood's letter from her husband's hands and opened it.

"Is it from the duchess?" she asked.

"Yes, it is from the duchess," replied her husband.

He saw her sink slowly down upon a lounge. Above her, in the upper panes of the window beneath which they were sitting, were the armorial bearings of the family in richest hues of stained glass. The colors and shadows fell with strange effects on her white dress, great bars of purple and crimson crossing each other, and opposite to her hung the superb Titian, with the blood-red rubies on the white throat.

Lord Arleigh watched Madaline as she read. Whatever might be the agony in his own heart, it was exceeded by hers. He saw the brightness die out of her face, the light fade from her eyes, the lips grow pale. But a few minutes before that young face had been bright with fairest beauty, eloquent with truest love, lit with passion and with poetry—now it was like a white mask.

Slowly, and as though it was with difficulty that she understood, Lady Arleigh read the letter through, and then—she did not scream or cry out—she raised her eyes to his face. He saw in them a depth of human sorrow and human woe which words are powerless to express.

So they looked at each other in passionate anguish. No words passed—of what avail were they? Each read the heart of the other. They knew that they must part. Then the closely-written pages fell to the ground, and Madaline's hands clasped each other in helpless anguish. The golden head fell forward on her breast. He noticed that in her agitation and sorrow she did not cling to him as she had clung before—that she did not even touch him. She seemed by instinct to understand that she was his wife now in name only.

So for some minutes they sat, while the sunset glowed in the west. He was the first to speak.

"My dear Madaline," he said, "my poor wife"—his voice seemed to startle her into new life and new pain—"I would rather have died than have given you this pain."

"I know it—I am sure of it," she said, "but, oh, Norman, how can I release you?"

"There is happily no question about that," he answered.

He saw her rise from her seat and stretch out her arms.

"What have I done," she cried, "that I must suffer so cruelly? What have I done?"

"Madaline," said Lord Arleigh, "I do not think that so cruel a fate has ever befallen any one as has befallen us. I do not believe that any one has ever suffered so cruelly, my darling. If death had parted us, the trial would have been easier to bear."

She turned her sad eyes to him.

"It is very cruel," she said, with a shudder. "I did not think the duchess would be so cruel."

"It is more than that—it is infamous!" he cried. "It is vengeance worthier of a fiend than of a woman."

"And I loved her so!" said the young girl, mournfully. "Husband, I will not reproach you—your love was chivalrous and noble; but why did you not let me speak freely to you? I declared to you that no doubt ever crossed my mind. I thought you knew all, though I considered it strange that you, so proud of your noble birth, should wish to marry me. I never imagined that you had been deceived. The duchess told me that you knew the whole history of my father's crime, that you were familiar with every detail of it, but that you wished me never to mention it—never even ever so remotely to allude to it. I thought it strange, Norman, that one in your position should be willing to overlook so terrible a blot; but she told me your love for me was so great that you could not live without me. She told me even more--that I must try to make my own life so perfect that the truest nobility of all, the nobility of virtue, might be mine."

"Did she really tell you that?" asked Lord Arleigh wonderingly.

"Yes; and, Norman, she said that you would discuss the question with me once, and once only—that would be on my wedding-day. On that day you would ask for and I should tell the whole history of my father's crime; and after that it was to be a dead-letter, never to be named between us."

"And you believed her?" he said.

"Yes, as I believe you. Why should I have doubted her? My faith in her was implicit. Why should I have even thought you would repent? More than once I was on the point of running away. But she would not let me go. She said that I must not be cruel to you—that you loved me so dearly that to lose me would prove a death-blow. So I believed her, and, against my will, staid on."

"I wish you had told me this," he said, slowly.

She raised her eyes to his.

"You would not let me speak, Norman. I tried so often, dear, but you would not let me."

"I remember," he acknowledged; "but, oh, my darling, how little I knew what you had to say! I never thought that anything stood between us except your poverty."

They remained silent for a few minutes—such sorrow as theirs needed no words. Lord Arleigh was again the first to speak.

"Madaline," he said, "will you tell me all you remember of your life."

"Yes; it is not much. It has been such a simple life, Norman, half made up of shadows. First, I can remember being a child in some far off woodland house. I am sure it was in the woods; for I remember the nuts growing on the trees, the squirrels, and the brown hares. I remember great masses of green foliage, a running brook, and the music of wild birds. I remember small latticed windows against which the ivy tapped. My father used to come in with his gun slung across his shoulders—he was a very handsome man, Norman, but not kind to either my mother or me. My mother was then, as she is now, patient, kind, gentle, long-suffering. I have never heard her complain. She loved me with an absorbing love. I was her only comfort. I did my best to deserve her affection. I loved her too. I cannot remember that she ever spoke one unkind word to me, and I can call to mind a thousand instances of indulgence and kindness. I knew that she deprived herself of almost everything to give it to me. I have seen her eat dry bread patiently, while for me and my father there was always some little dainty. The remembrance of the happiness of my early life begins and ends with my mother. My memories of her are all pleasant." She continued as though recalling her thoughts with difficulty. "I can remember some one else. I do not know who or what he was, except that he was, I think, a doctor. He used to see me, and used to amuse me. Then there came a dark day. I cannot tell what happened, but after that day I never saw my friend again."

He was looking at her with wondering eyes.

"And you remember no more than that about him, Madaline?"

"No," she replied. "Then came a time," she went on, "when it seemed to me that my mother spent all her days and nights in weeping. There fell a terrible shadow over us, and we removed. I have no recollection of the journey—not the faintest; but I can remember my sorrow at leaving the bright green woods for a dull, gloomy city lodging. My mother was still my hope and comfort. After we came to London she insisted that, no matter what else went wrong I should have a good education; she toiled, saved, suffered for me. 'My darling must be a

lady,' she used to say. She would not let me work, though I entreated her with tears in my eyes. I used to try to deceive her even, but I never could succeed. She loved me so, my poor mother. She would take my hands in hers and kiss them. 'Such dainty hands, dear,' she would say, 'must not be spoiled.' After a great deal of trouble and expense, she contrived to get me an engagement as governess-pupil in a lady's school; there I did receive a good education. One failing of my mother always filled me with wonder—she used to fancy that people watched me. 'Has any one spoken to you, darling?' she would ask. 'Has any stranger seen you?' I used to laugh, thinking it was parental anxiety; but it has struck me since as strange. While I was at the ladies' school my father committed the crime for which I—alas! –am suffering now."

"Will you tell me what the crime was?" requested Lord Arleigh.

A dreary hopelessness, inexpressibly painful to see, came over her face, and a deep-drawn sigh broke from her lips.

"I will tell you all about it," she said—"would to Heaven that I had done so before! My mother, many years ago, was in the service of Lady L'Estrange; she was her maid then. Miss L'Estrange married the Duke of Hazlewood, and, when my mother was in great difficulties, she went to the duchess to ask for employment. The duchess was always kind," continued Madaline, "and she grew interested in my mother. She came to see her, and I was at home. She told me afterward that when she first saw me she conceived a liking for me. I know now that I was but the victim of her plot."

She stopped abruptly, but Lord Arleigh encouraged her.

"Tell me all, Madaline," he said, gently; "none of this is your fault, my poor wife. Tell me all."

"The duchess was very kind to my mother, and befriended her in many ways. She interested the duke in her case, and he promised to find employment for my unfortunate father, who went to his house to see him. Whether my father had ever done wrong before, I cannot tell. Sometimes I fear that he had done so, for no man falls suddenly into crime. In few words—oh, Norman, how hard they are to say!—what he saw in the duke's mansion tempted him. He joined some burglars, and they robbed the house. My unfortunate father was found with his pockets filled with valuable jewelry. My mother would not let me read the history of the trial, but I learned the result—he was sentenced to ten years' penal servitude."

She paused again; the dreary hopelessness of her face, the pain in her voice, touched him inexpressibly.

"None of this is your fault, my darling," he said. "Go on."

"Then," she continued, "the duchess was kinder than ever to

my mother. She furnished her with the means of gaining her livelihood; she offered to finish my education and adopt me. My mother was at first unwilling; she did not wish me to leave her. But the duchess said that her love was selfish—that it was cruel to stand in my light when such an offer was made. She consented and I, wondering much what my ultimate fate was to be, was sent to school in Paris. When I had been there for some time, the duke and duchess came to see me. I must not forget to tell you, Norman, that she saw me herself first privately. She said he was so forgetful that he would never remember having heard the name of Dornham. She added that the keeping of the secret was very important, for, if it became known, all her kind efforts in our favor must cease at once. I promised to be most careful. The duke and duchess arranged that I was to go home with them and live as the duchess' companion. Again she warned me never upon any account to mention who I was, or anything about me. She called me the daughter of an old friend—and so I was, although that friend was a very humble one. From the first, Norman, she talked so much about you; you were the model of everything chivalrous and noble, the hero of a hundred pleasant stories. I had learned to love you long even before I saw you—to love you after a fashion, Norman, as a hero. I can see it all now. She laid the plot—we were the victims. I remember that the very morning on which you saw me first the duchess sent me into the trellised arbor; I was to wait there until she summoned me. Rely upon it, Norman, she also gave orders that you were to be shown into the morning-room, although she pretended to be annoyed at it. I can see all the plot now plainly. I can only say—— Oh, Norman, you and I were both blind! We ought to have seen through her scheme. Why should she have brought us together if she had not meant that we should love each other? What have we in common—I, the daughter of a felon; you, a nobleman, proud of your ancestry, proud of your name? Oh, Norman, if I could but die here at your feet, and save you from myself!"

Even as she spoke she sank sobbing, no longer on to his breast, no longer with her arms clasped round his neck, but at his feet.

He raised her in his arms—for he loved her with passionate love.

"Madaline," he said, in a low voice, "do not make my task harder for me. That which I have to do is indeed bitter to me—do not make it harder."

His appeal touched her. For his sake she must try to be strong.

Slowly he looked up at the long line of noble men and women whose faces shone down upon him; slowly he looked at the

graceful figure and bowed head of his wife, the daughter of a felon—the first woman who had ever entered those walls with even the semblance of a stain upon her name. As he looked at her the thought came to him that, if his housekeeper had told him that she had inadvertently placed such a person—the daughter of a felon—in his kitchen, he would never have rested until she had been sent away.

He must part from her—this lovely girl-wife whom he loved with such passionate love. The daughter of a criminal could not reign at Beechgrove. If the parting cost his life and hers it must take place. It was cruel. The strong man trembled with agitation; his lips quivered, his face was pale as death. He bent over his weeping wife.

"Madaline," he said, gently, "I do not understand the ways of destiny. Why you and I have to suffer this torture I cannot say. I can see nothing in our lives that deserves such punishment. Heaven knows best. Why we have met and loved, only to undergo such anguish, is a puzzle I cannot solve. There is only one thing plain to me, and that is that we must part."

He never forgot how she sprang away from him, her colorless face raised to his.

"Part, Norman!" she cried. "We cannot part now; I am your wife!"

"I know it; but we must part."

"Part!" repeated the girl. "We cannot; the tie that binds us cannot be sundered so easily."

"My poor Madaline, it must be."

She caught his hand in hers.

"You are jesting, Norman. We cannot be separated—we are one. Do you forget the words—'for better for worse,' 'till death us do part?' You frighten me!" And she shrank from him with a terrible shudder.

"It must be as I have said," declared the unhappy man. "I have been deceived—so have you. We have to suffer for another's sin."

"We may suffer," she said, dully, "but we cannot part. You cannot send me away from you."

"I must," he persisted. "Darling, I speak with deepest love and pity, yet with unwavering firmness. You cannot think that, with that terrible stain resting on you, you can take your place here."

"But I am your wife!" she cried, in wild terror.

"You are my wife," he returned, with quivering lips; "but you must remain so in name only." He paused abruptly, for it seemed to him that the words burned his lips as they passed them. "My wife," he muttered, "in name only."

With a deep sob she stretched out her arms.

"But I love you, Norman—you must not send me away! I love you—I shall die if I have to leave you!"

The words seemed to linger on her lips.

"My darling," he said, gently, "it is even harder for me than for you."

"No, no," she cried, "for I love you so dearly, Norman—better than my life! Darling, my whole heart went out to you long ago—you cannot give it back to me."

"If it kills you and myself too," he declared, hoarsely, "I must send you away."

"Send me away? Oh, no, Norman, not away! Let me stay with you, husband, darling. We were married only this morning. My place is here by your side—I cannot go."

Looking away from her, with those passionate accents still ringing in his ears, his only answer was:

"Family honor demands it."

"Norman," she implored, "listen to me, dear! Do not send me away from you. I will be so good, so devoted. I will fulfill my duties so well. I will bear myself so worthily that no one shall remember anything against me; they shall forget my unhappy birth, and think only that you have chosen well. Oh, Norman, be merciful to me! Leaving you would be a living death!"

"You cannot suffer more than I do," he said—"and I would give my life to save you pain; but, my darling, I cannot be so false to the traditions of my race, so false to the honor of my house, so untrue to my ancestors and to myself, as to ask you to stay here. There has never been a blot on our name. The annals of our family are pure and stainless. I could not ask you to remain here and treat you as my wife, even to save my life!"

"I have done no wrong, Norman; why should you punish me so cruelly?"

"No, my darling, you have done no wrong—and the punishment is more mine than yours. I lose the wife whom I love most dearly—I lose my all."

"And what do I lose?" she moaned.

"Not so much as I do, because you are the fairest and sweetest of women. You shall live in all honor, Madaline. You shall never suffer social degradation, darling—the whole world shall know that I hold you blameless; but you can be my wife in name only."

She was silent for a few minutes, and then she held out her arms to him again.

"Oh, my love, relent!" she cried. "Do not be so hard on me—indeed, I have done no wrong. Be merciful! I am your wife; your name is so mighty, so noble, it will overshadow me. Who notices the weed that grows under the shadow of the kingly oak?

Oh, my husband, let me stay! I love you so dearly—let me stay!"

The trial was so hard and cruel that great drops fell from his brow and his lips trembled.

"My darling, it is utterly impossible. We have been deceived. The consequences of that deceit must be met. I owe duties to the dead as well as to the living. I cannot transgress the rules of my race. Within these time-honored walls no woman can remain who is not of stainless lineage and stainless repute. Do not urge me further."

"Norman," she said, in a trembling voice, "you are doing wrong in sending me away. You cannot outrage Heaven's laws with impunity. It is Heaven's law that husband and wife should cleave together. You cannot break it."

"I have no wish to break it. I say simply that I shall love you until I die, but that you must be my wife in name only."

"It is bitterly hard," she observed; and then she looked up at him suddenly. "Norman," she said, "let me make one last appeal to you. I know the stigma is terrible—I know that the love-story must be hateful to you—I know that the vague sense of disgrace which clings to you even now is almost more than you can bear; but, my darling, since you say you love me so dearly, can you not bear this trial for my sake, if in everything else I please you—if I prove myself a loving, trustful, truthful wife, if I fulfill all my duties so as to reflect honor on you, if I prove a worthy mistress of your household?"

"I cannot," he replied, hoarsely; but there must have been something in his face from which she gathered hope, for she went on, with a ring of passionate love in her voice.

"If, after we had been married, I had found out that you had concealed something from me, do you think that I should have loved you less?"

"I do not think you would, Madaline; but the present case is different—entirely different; it is not for my own sake, but for the honor of my race. Better a thousand times that my name should die out than that upon it there should be the stain of crime!"

"But, Norman—this is a weak argument, I know—a woman's argument—still, listen to it, love—who would know my secret if it were well kept?"

"None; but I should know it," he replied, "and that would be more than sufficient. Better for all the world to know than for me. I would not keep such a secret. I could not. It would hang over my head like a drawn sword, and some day the sword would fall. My children, should Heaven send any to me, might grow up, and then, in the height of some social or political struggle, when man often repeats against his fellow man all that

he knows of the vilest and the worst, there might be thrown into their faces the fact that they were descended from a felon. It must not be; a broken heart is hard to bear—injured honor is perhaps harder."

She drew up her slender figure to its full height, her lovely face glowed with a light he did not understand.

"You may be quite right," she said. "I cannot dispute what you say. Your honor may be a sufficient reason for throwing aside the wife of less than twelve hours, but I cannot see it. I cannot refute what you have said, but my heart tells me you are wrong."

"Would to Heaven that I thought the same!" he rejoined, quickly. "But I understand the difficulties of the case, my poor Madaline, and you do not."

She turned away with a low, dreary sigh, and the light died from her face.

"Madaline," said Lord Arleigh, quietly, "do not think, my darling, that you suffer most—indeed, it is not so. Think how I love you—think how precious you are to me—and then ask yourself if it is no pain to give you up."

"I know it is painful," she continued, sadly; "but, Norman, if the decision and choice rested with me as they do with you, I should act differently."

"I would, Heaven knows, if I could," he said, slowly.

"Such conduct is not just to me," she continued, her face flushing with the eagerness of her words. "I have done no wrong, no harm, yet I am to be driven from your house and home—I am to be sent away from you, divorced in all but name. I say it is not fair, Norman—not just. All my womanhood rises in rebellion against such a decree. What will the world say of me? That I was weighed in the balance and found wanting—that I was found to be false or light, due doubtless to my being lowly born. Do you think I have no sense of honor—no wish to keep my name and fame stainless? Could you do me a greater wrong, do you think, than to put me away, not twelve hours after our marriage, like one utterly unworthy?"

He made no answer. She went on in her low, passionate, musical voice.

"When I read in history the story of Anne of Cleves, I thought it cruel to be sought in marriage, brought over from another land, looked at, sneered at, and dismissed; but, Norman, it seems to me her fate was not so cruel as mine."

"You are wrong," he cried. "I hold you in all reverence, in all honor, in deepest respect. You are untouched by the disgrace attached to those nearest to you. It is not that. You know that, even while I say we must part, I love you from the very depths of my heart."

"I can say no more," she moaned, wringing her hands. "My own heart, my woman's instinct, tells me you are wrong. I cannot argue with you, nor can I urge anything more."

She turned from him. He would have given much to take her into his arms, and kissing her, bid her stay.

"You remember the old song, Madaline?

"'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more.'

If I could be false to the dead, Madaline, I should be untrue to the living. That I am not so is your security for my faith. If I could be false to the traditions of my race, I could be false to my vows of love."

"I can say no more—I can urge no more. You are a man—wise, strong, brave. I submit."

It was a cruel fate. He looked round on his pictured ancestors. Would they have suffered, have sacrificed as much for the honor of their house as he was about to sacrifice now? Yes, he knew they would, for love of race and pride of name had always been unspeakably dear to them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Lord Arleigh raised his head from his breast. His wife was kneeling sobbing at his feet.

"Norman," she said, in a broken voice, "I yield, I submit. You know best, dear. In truth, I am not worthy to be your wife. I urge no claim on you; but, my darling, must I leave you? You are the very light of my life, heart of my heart, soul of my soul—must I leave you? Could I not remain here as your servant, your slave, the lowliest in your house—somewhere near, where I may hear the tones of your voice, the sound of your footsteps—where I may stand sometimes at the window and see you ride away—where I may render you little attentions such as loving wives render? Oh, Norman, be merciful, and grant me that at least!"

"My darling, I cannot—do not tempt me. You do not understand. I love you with a fierce, passionate love. If you were near me, I should be compelled to show that love to you every hour of the day—to treat you as my dear and honored wife. If you were near me, I might forget my resolves and remember only my love."

"No one should know," she whispered, "that I was your wife. I should take the guise of the humblest servant in the place. No one should know, love. Oh, darling, let it be so!"

She saw great drops of agony on his brow; she saw a world of pain in his eyes which alarmed her.

"It cannot be," he replied, hoarsely. "You must urge me no more—you are torturing me."

Then she rose, humbly enough, and turned away.

"I will say no more, Norman. Now do with me what you please."

There was silence for a few minutes. The sun was sinking low in the western sky, the chirp of the birds was growing faint in the trees. She raised her colorless face to his.

"I submit, Norman," she said. "You have some plan to propose. Do with me just as you will."

It was cruel—no crueler fate had ever fallen to a man's lot—but honor obliged him to act as he did. He took her hand in his.

"Some day, dear wife," he said, "you will understand what suffering this step has cost me."

"Yes," she murmured, faintly; "I may understand in time."

"While I have been sitting here," he went on, "I have been thinking it all over, and I have come to a decision as to what will be best for you and for me. You are Lady Arleigh of Beechgrove—you are my wife; you shall have all the honor and respect due to your position."

She shuddered as though the words were a most cruel mockery.

"You will honor," she questioned, bitterly, "the daughter of a felon?"

"I will honor my wife, who has been deceived even more cruelly than myself," he replied. "I have thought of a plan," he continued, "which can be easily carried out. On our estate not twenty miles from here—there is a little house called the Dower House—a house where the dowagers of the family have generally resided. It is near Winiston, a small country town. A housekeeper and two servants live in the house now, and keep it in order. You will be happy there, my darling, I am sure, as far as is possible. I will see that you have everything you need or require."

She listened as one who hears but dimly.

"You have no objection to raise, have you, Madaline?"

"No," she replied, "it matters little where I live; I only pray that my life may be short."

"Hush, my darling. You pain me."

"Oh, Norman, Norman," she cried, "what will they think of me—what will they say—your servants, your friends?"

"We must not trouble about that," said Norman; "we must not pause to consider what the world will say. We must do what we think is right."

He took out his watch and looked at it.

"It is eight o'clock," he said; "we shall have time to drive to Winiston to-night."

There was a world of sorrowful reproach in the blue eyes raised to his.

"I understand," she said, quietly; "you do not wish that the daughter of a felon should sleep, even for one night, under your roof."

"You pain me, and you pain yourself; but it is, if you will hear the truth, my poor Madaline, just as you say. Even for these ancient walls I have such reverence."

"Since my presence dishonors them," she said, quietly, "I will go. Heaven will judge between us, Norman. I say that you are wrong. If I am to leave your house, I should like to go at once. I will go to my room and prepare for the journey."

He did not attempt to detain her, for he well knew that, if she made another appeal to him, he could not resist the impulse to clasp her in his arms, and at the cost of what he thought his honor to bid her stay.

She lingered before him, beautiful, graceful, sorrowful.

"Is there anything more you would like to say to me?" she asked, with sad humility.

"I dare not," he uttered, hoarsely; "I cannot trust myself."

He watched her as with slow, graceful steps she passed down the long gallery, never turning her fair face or golden head back to him, her white robes trailing on the parquetry floor. When she had reached the end, he saw her draw aside the hangings and stand for a minute looking at the pictured faces of the Arleighs; then she disappeared, and he was left alone.

He buried his face in his hands and wept bitterly.

"I could curse the woman who has wrought this misery!" he exclaimed, presently.

And then the remembrance of Philippa, as he had known her years before—Philippa as a child, Philippa, his mother's favorite—restrained him.

"Perhaps I too was to blame," he thought; "she would not have taken such cruel vengeance had I been more candid."

* * * * * * * *

Lady Arleigh went to her room. The pretty traveling-costume lay where she had left it; the housekeeper had not put away anything. Hastily taking off her white dress and removing the jewels from her neck, and the flowers from her hair, Madaline placed them aside, and then having attired herself for the journey, she went down stairs, meeting no one.

Some little surprise was created among the servants when orders came for the carriage to be got ready.

"Going out at this time of night. What can it mean?" asked one of them.

"They are going to the Dower House," answered a groom.

"Ah, then his lordship and her ladyship will not remain at the Abbey! How strange! But there—rich people have nothing to do but indulge in whims and caprices!" said the under housemaid, who was immediately frowned down by her superiors in office.

Not a word was spoken by husband and wife as Lady Arleigh took her seat in the carriage. Whatever she felt was buried in her own breast. Her face shone marble-white underneath her vail, and her eyes were bent downward. Never a word did she speak as the carriage drove slowly through the park, where the dews were falling and the stars were bright.

Once her husband turned to her and tried to take her hand in his, but she drew back.

"It will be better not to talk, Norman," she said. "I can bear it best in silence."

So they drove on in unbroken quietude. The dew lay glistening on the grass and trees; all nature was hushed, tranquil, sweet, and still. It was surely the strangest drive that husband and wife had ever taken together. More than once, noting the silent, graceful figure, Lord Arleigh was tempted to ask Madaline to fly with him to some foreign land, where they could live and die unknown—more than once he was tempted to kiss the beautiful lips and say to her, "Madaline, you shall not leave me;" but the dishonor attaching to his name caused him to remain silent.

They had a rapid drive, and reached Winiston House—as it was generally called—before eleven. Great was the surprise and consternation excited by so unexpected an arrival. The house was in the charge of a widow whose husband had been the late lord's steward. She looked somewhat dubiously at Lord Arleigh, and then at his companion, when they had entered. Madaline never opened her lips. Lord Arleigh was strangely pale and confused.

"Mrs. Burton," he said, "I can hardly imagine that you have heard of my marriage. This is my wife—Lady Arleigh."

All the woman's doubt and hesitation vanished then—she became all attention; but Lord Arleigh inwardly loathed his fate when he found himself compelled to offer explanations that he would have given worlds to avoid.

"I am not going to remain here myself," he said, in answer to the inquiries about rooms and refreshments. "Lady Arleigh will live at Winiston House altogether; and, as you have always served the family faithfull and well, I should like you to remain in her service."

The woman looked up at him in such utter bewilderment and surprise that he felt somewhat afraid of what she might say; he therefore hastened to add:

"Family matters that concern no one but ourselves compel me to make this arrangement. Lady Arleigh will be mistress now of Winiston House. She will have a staff of servants here. You can please yourself about remaining—either as housekeeper or not—just as you like."

"Of course, my lord, I shall be only too thankful to remain; but it seems so very strange——"

Lord Arleigh held up his hand.

"Hush!" he said. "A well-trained servant finds nothing strange."

The woman took the hint and retired. Lord Arleigh turned to say farewell to his wife. He found her standing, white and tearless, by the window.

"Oh, my darling," he cried, "we must now part! Yet how can I leave you—so sad, so silent, so despairing? Speak to me, my own love—one word—just one word."

Her woman's heart, so quick to pity, was touched by his prayer. She smiled as sad, as sweet a smile as ever was seen on woman's lips.

"I shall be better in time, Norman," she said, "and shall not always be sad."

"There are some business arrangements which must be made," he continued, hurriedly—"but it will be better for us not to meet again just yet, Madaline—I could not bear it. I will see that all is arranged for your comfort. You must have every luxury and——"

"Luxury!" she repeated, mockingly. "Why, I would rather be the sorriest beggar that ever breathed than be myself! Luxury! You mock me, Lord Arleigh."

"You will be less bitter against me in time, my darling," he said. "I mean just what I say—that you will have everything this world can give you——"

"Except love and happiness," she interposed.

"Love you have, sweet; you have mine—the fervent, true, honest, deep love of my heart and soul. Happiness comes in time to all who do their duty. Think of Carlyle's words—'Say unto all kinds of happiness, "I can do without thee"—with self-renunciation life begins.'"

"Carlyle had no such fate as mine in his thoughts," she said, "when he wrote that. But, Lord Arleigh, I do not wish to complain. I am sorry that I have interrupted you. I have accepted my fate. Say all you wish—I will be silent."

"I have only to add, my darling, that if money, luxury, comfort can give you happiness, you shall have them all. You shall

have respect and honor too, for I will take care that the whole world knows that this separation arises from no fault of yours. Promise me, darling wife—oh, Heaven help me, how hard it is! —promise me, when the first smart of the pain is over, that you will try to be happy."

She bent her head, but spoke no word.

"Promise me too, Madaline, that, if sickness and sorrow should come to you, you will send for me at once."

"I promise," she said.

"A few words more, and I have done. Tell me what course you wish me to pursue toward the duchess."

"I have no wish in the matter," she replied, directly. "She was kind to me once; for the sake of that kindness I forgive her. She forgot that I must suffer in her wish to punish you. I shall leave her to Heaven."

"And I," he said, "will do the same; voluntarily I will never see her or speak to her again."

There remained for him only to say farewell. He took her little white hand; it was as cold as death.

"Farewell, my love," he said—"farewell!"

He kissed her face with slow, sweet reverence, as he would have kissed the face of a dead woman whom he loved; and then he was gone.

Like one in a dream, she heard the wheel of a carriage rolling away. She stretched out her hands with a faint cry.

"Norman—my husband—my love!" she called; but from the deep silence of the night there came no response. He was gone.

Madaline passed the night in watching the silent skies. Mrs. Burton, after providing all that was needful, had retired quickly to rest. She did not think it "good manners" to intrude upon her ladyship.

All night Madaline watched the stars, and during the course of that night the best part of her died—youth, love, hope, happiness. Strange thoughts came to her—thoughts that she could hardly control. Why was she so cruelly punished? What had she done? She had read of wicked lives that had met with terrible endings. She had read of sinful men and wicked women whose crimes, even in this world, had been most bitterly punished. She had read of curses following sin. But what had she done? No woman's lot surely had ever been so bitter. She could not understand it, while the woman who had loved her husband, who had practiced fraud and deceit, and lied, went unpunished.

Yet her case was hardly that, for Norman did not love her. Daughter of a felon as she—Madaline—was—poor, lowly, obscure—he had given her his heart, although he could never

make her the mistress of his home. There was some compensation for human suffering, some equality in the human lot, after all. She would be resigned. There were lots in life far worse than hers. What if she had learned to love Norman, and he had never cared for her? What if she had learned to love him, and had found him less noble than he was? What if, in the bitterness of his disappointment and passion, he had vented his anger upon her? After all, she could not but admire his sense of honor, his respect for his name, his devotion to his race; she could not find fault with his conduct, although it had cost her so dear.

"I think," she admitted to herself, "that in his place I should have done the same thing. If my parent's crime has brought sorrow and disgrace to me, who have no name, no fame, no glory of race to keep up, what must it have brought to him? In his place I should have done as he has done."

Then, after a time, she clasped her hands.

"I will submit," she said. "I will leave my fate to Providence."

When morning dawned she went to her room; she did not wish the household to know that she had sat up and watched the night through.

Once out of the house, Lord Arleigh seemed to realize for the first time what had happened; with a gesture of despair he threw himself back in the carriage. The footman came to him.

"Where to, my lord—to Beechgrove?"

"No," replied Lord Arleigh—"to the railway station. I want to catch the night-mail for London."

Lord Arleigh was just in time for the train. The footman caught a glimpse of his master's face as the train went off—it was white and rigid.

"Of all the weddings in this world, well, this is the queerest!" he exclaimed to himself.

When he reached Beechgrove, he told his fellow-servants what had happened, and many were the comments offered about the marriage that was yet no marriage—the wedding that was no wedding—the husband and wife who were so many miles apart. What could it mean?

CHAPTER XXIX.

Three days after Lord Arleigh's most inauspicious marriage, the Duchess of Hazlewood sat in her drawing-room alone. Those three days had changed her terribly; her face had lost its bloom, the light had died from her dark eyes, there were great

lines of pain round her lips. She sat with her hands folded listlessly, her eyes, full of dreamy sorrow, fixed on the moving foliage of the woods. Presently Lady Peters entered with an open newspaper in her hand.

"Philippa, my dear," she said, "I am very uncomfortable. Should you think this paragraph refers to Lord Arleigh? It seems to do so—yet I cannot believe it."

The deadly pallor that was always the sign of great emotion with the duchess spread now even to her lips.

"What does it say?" she asked.

Lady Peters held the paper out to her; but her hands trembled so that she could not take it.

"I cannot read it," she said, wearily. "Read it to me."

And then Lady Peters read:

"Scandal in High Life.—Some strange revelations are shortly expected in aristocratic circles. A few days since a noble lord, bearing one of the most ancient titles in England, was married. The marriage took place under circumstances of great mystery; and the mystery has been increased by the separation of bride and bridegroom on their wedding-day. What has led to a separation is at present a secret, but it is expected that in a few days all particulars will be known. At present the affair is causing a great sensation."

A fashionable paper which indulged largely in personalities, also had a telling article on Lord Arleigh's marriage. No names were mentioned, but the references were unmistakable. A private marriage, followed by a separation on the same day, was considered a fair mark for scandal. This also Lady Peters read, and the duchess listened with white, trembling lips.

"It must refer to Lord Arleigh," said Lady Peters.

"It cannot," was the rejoinder. "He was far too deeply in love with his fair-faced bride to leave her."

"I never did quite approve of that marriage," observed Lady Peters.

"The scandal cannot be about him," declared the duchess. "We should have heard if there had been anything wrong."

The next day a letter was handed to her. She recognized the handwriting—it was Lord Arleigh's. She laid the note down, not daring to read it before Lady Peters. What had he to say to her?

When she was alone she opened it.

"You will be pleased to hear, duchess, that your scheme has entirely succeeded. You have made two innocent people who have never harmed you as wretched as it is possible for human beings to be. In no respect has your vengeance failed. I—

your old friend, playmate, brother, the son of your mother's dearest friend—have been made miserable for life. Your revenge was well chosen. You knew that, however I might worship Madaline, my wife, however much I might love her, she could never be mistress of Beechgrove, she could never be the mother of my children; you knew that, and therefore I say your revenge was admirably chosen. It were useless to comment on your wickedness, or to express the contempt I feel for the woman who could deliberately plan such evil and distress. I must say this, however. All friendship and acquaintance between us is at an end. You will be to me henceforward an entire stranger. I could retaliate. I could write and tell your husband, who is a man of honor, of the unworthy deed you have done; but I shall not do that—it would be unmanly. Before my dear wife and I parted, we agreed that the punishment of your sin should be left to Heaven. So I leave it. To a woman unworthy enough to plan such a piece of baseness, it will be satisfaction sufficient to know that her scheme has succeeded. Note the words 'my wife and I parted'—parted, never perhaps to meet again. She has all my love, all my heart, all my unutterable respect and deep devotion; but, as you know, she can never be mistress of my house. May Heaven forgive you.

ARLEIGH."

She could have borne with his letter if it had been filled with the wildest invictives—if he had reproached her, even cursed her; his dignified forbearance, his simple acceptance of the wrong she had done him, she could not tolerate.

She laid down the letter. It was all over now—the love for which she would have given her life, the friendship that had once been so true, the vengeance that had been so carefully planned. She had lost his love, his friendship, his esteem. She could see him no more. He despised her. There came to her a vision of what she might have been to him had things been different—his friend, adviser, counselor—the woman upon whom he would have looked as the friend of his chosen wife—the woman whom, after all, he loved best—his sister, his truest confidante. All this she might have been but for her revenge. She had forfeited it all now. Her life would be spent as though he did not exist; and there was no one but herself to blame.

Still she had had her revenge; she smiled bitterly to herself as she thought of that. She had punished him. The beautiful face grew pale, and the dark eyes shone through a mist of tears.

"I am not hardened enough," she said to herself, mockingly, "to be quite happy over an evil deed. I want something more of wickedness in my composition."

She parried skillfully all Lady Peters' questions; she professed entire ignorance of all that had happened. People appealed to her as Lord Arleigh's friend. They asked her:

"What does this mean? Lord Arleigh was married quietly, and seperated from his wife the same day. What does it mean?"

"I cannot tell, but you may rely upon it that a reasonable explanation of the circumstanes will be forthcoming," she would reply. "Lord Arleigh is, as we all know, an honorable man, and I knew his wife."

"But what can it mean?" the questioners would persist.

"I cannot tell," she would answer, laughingly. "I only know that we must give the matter the best interpretation we can."

So she escaped; and no one associated the Duchess of Hazlewood with Lord Arleigh's strange marriage. She knew that when her husband returned she would have to give some kind of explanation; but she was quite indifferent about that. Her life, she said to herself, was ended.

When the duke did come home, after a few pleasant weeks on the sea, the first thing he heard was the story about Lord Arleigh. It astounded him. His friend Captain Austin related it to him as soon as he had landed.

"Whom did you say he married?" inquired the mystified duke.

"Rumor said at first that it was a distant relative of yours," replied the captain, "afterward it proved to be some young lady whom he had met at a small watering-place."

"What was her name? Who was she? It was no relative of mine; I have very few; I have no young female relative at all."

"No—that was all a mistake; I cannot tell you how it arose. He married a lady of the name of Dornham."

"Dornham!" said the puzzled nobleman. "The name is not unfamiliar to me. Dornham—ah, I remember!"

He said no more, but the captain saw a grave expression come over his handsome face, and it occurred to him that some unpleasant thought occurred to his companion's mind.

CHAPTER XXX.

One of the first questions, after his return, that the Duke of Hazlewood put to his wife was about Lord Arleigh. She looked at him with a careless smile.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" she asked.

"Certainly not, Philippa; but, considering that Arleigh has

been as a brother to you all these years, you must take some interest in him. Is this story of his marriage true?"

"True?" she repeated. "Why, of course it is—perfectly true! Do you not know whom he has married?"

"I am half afraid to ask—half afraid to find that my suspicions have been realized."

"He has married my companion," said the duchess. "I have no wish to blame him; I will say nothing."

"It is a great pity that he ever saw her," observed the duke, warmly. "From all I hear, the man's life is wrecked."

"I warned him," said Philippa, eagerly. "I refused at first to introduce her to him. I told him that prudence and caution were needful."

"How came it about then, Philippa?"

The duchess shrugged her shoulders.

"There is a fate, I suppose, in these things. He saw her one day when I was out of the way, and, according to his own account, fell in love with her on the spot. Be that as it may, he was determined to marry her."

"It seems very strange," said the Duke of Hazlewood, musingly. "I have never known him to do anything 'queer' before."

"He can never say that I did not warn him," she remarked, carelessly.

"But it was such a wretched marriage for him. Who was she, Philippa? I have never made many inquiries about her."

"I would really rather not discuss the question," said the duchess; "it has no interest for me now. Norman and I have quarreled. In all probability we shall never be friends again."

"All through this marriage?" interrogated the duke.

"All through this marriage," repeated his wife—"and I know no subject that irritates me so much. Please say no more about it, Vere."

"I should like to know who the girl is," he urged. "You have never told me."

"I shall be jealous of her in a few minutes!" exclaimed Philippa. "Already she has sundered an old friendship that I thought would last forever; and now, directly you return, you can talk of no one else."

"I should like to see you jealous," said the duke, who was one of the most unsuspicious of men.

She smiled; yet there came to her a sharp, bitter memory of the night on the balcony when she had been jealous of the ideal woman, the unknown love whom Norman had sketched for her.

The duke, however, was pertinacious; he could not give up the subject.

"You told me," he resumed, "that she was the daughter of an old friend of yours named Dornham—and it seems to me, Philippa, that I have some kind of remembrance of that name which is far from pleasant."

With an air of resignation the duchess rose from her seat.

"I am tired, Vere," she said, "quite tired of the subject. Yet I ought not to be selfish. Of course, the incident is all new to you—you have been away from all kinds of news; to us it is an old, worn-out story. Lord Arleigh and I quarreled and parted because of his marriage, so you may imagine it is not a very attractive subject to me."

"Well, I will say no more about it, but I am sincerely sorry, Philippa. Of all our friends, I like Lord Arleigh best; and I shall decidedly refuse to quarrel with him. His marriage is his own affair, not mine."

"Still, you cannot make a friend of the man whom I decline to know," she rejoined, hurriedly.

"Certainly not, if you place the matter in such a light," he said, gravely. "I shall always consider it my pleasure and duty to consult you on such points. I will call no man my friend whom you dislike."

So, for the time, all danger was tided over; the duke saw that the subject annoyed his wife, and did not voluntarily resume it. He was too true a gentleman to think of discussing with another lady what he did not discuss with his own wife, so that the subject was not mentioned between Lady Peters and himself.

Then for the fair young Duchess of Hazlewood began the new life which had in it no old friend. If she repented of her vengeance, she did not say so. If she would fain have undone her evil deed, she never owned it. But, as time wore on, people saw a great change in her. She gave herself more to the gayeties and follies of the world; there were few fashions which she did not lead, few gay pursuits in which she did not take an active part. The character of her beauty, too, seemed changed. She had always been brilliant, but somewhat of a strange unrest came into her face and manner; the dark eyes seemed to be always looking for something they could not find. Her mind, though charming and fascinating as ever, grew variable and unsteady. She had always been too proud for coquetry; she remained so now. But she no longer shunned and avoided all flattery and homage; it seemed rather to please her than not. And —greatest change of all—the name of Lord Arleigh never crossed her lips. He himself had retired from public life; the great hopes formed of him were all dying away. Men spoke of him with mystery, women with sad, gentle interest; those who had known him knew him no more.

He did not return to Beechgrove; it seemed to him that he

could never again endure the sight of the place where he had separated from his wife—that his ancient home had been in some manner desecrated. The mansion was left in charge of Mrs. Chatterton, whose wonder at the new and strange state of things never ceased.

"Such a marriage!" She held up her hands in horror as she thought of it. Indeed, to her the event appeared like a wedding and a funeral on the same day. She had not seen Lady Arleigh since, yet she had never forgot the fair, lovely young face that had shone for so short a time in the grand old home.

Lord Arleigh saw that his wife had everything needful for her; he settled a large income on her; he sent from London horses, carriages, everything that her heart could desire; he saw that she had a proper household formed. Whatever else the world might say, it could not say that he showed her any want of respect or any want of attention. Lord Arleigh did not live with his wife, never visited her, never spoke of her; but it was quite clear that his motive for doing none of these things lay deeper than the world knew or could even guess.

The family solicitor went down to Winiston House occasionally, but Lord Arleigh never. The few who met him after his marriage found him strangely altered. Even his face had changed; the frank, honest, open look that had once seemed to defy and challenge and meet the whole world had died away; he looked now like a man with a secret to keep—a secret that had taken his youth from him, that had taken the light from his life, that had shadowed his eyes, drawn hard lines of care round his lips, wrinkled his face, taken the music from his voice, and made of him a changed and altered, a sad, unhappy man.

There were one or two intimate friends—friends who had known him in his youth—who ventured to ask what this secret was, who appealed to him frankly to make his trouble known, telling him that sorrow shared was sorrow lightened; but with a sad smile he only raised his head and answered that his sorrow was one of which he could not speak. Sometimes a kindly woman who had known him as boy and man—one with daughters and sons of her own—would ask him what was the nature of his sorrow. He would never tell.

"I cannot explain," he would reply.

Society tried hard to penetrate the mystery. Some said that Lady Arleigh was insane, and that he had not discovered it until the afternoon of his wedding-day. Others said that she had a fierce temper, and that he was unaware of it until they were traveling homeward. These were the most innocent rumors; others were more scandalous. It was said that he had discovered some great crime that she had committed. Few believed

such stories; Lord Arleigh, they declared, was not the man to make so terrible a mistake.

Then, after a time, all the sensation and wonder died away; society accepted the fact that Lord Arleigh was unhappily married and had separated from his wife.

He went abroad, and then returned home, sojourning at quiet watering places where he thought his story and himself would be unknown. Afterward he went to Normandy, and tried to lose the remembrance of his troubles in his search after the picturesque. But, when he had done everything that he could do to relieve his distress of mind, he owned to himself that he was a most miserable man.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A year and a half had passed, and Lord Arleigh was still, as it were, out of the world. It was the end of April, a spring fresh and beautiful. His heart had turned to Beechgrove, where the violets were springing and the young larches were budding; but he could not go thither—the picture-gallery was a haunted spot to him—and London he could endure. The fashionable intelligence told him that the Duke and Duchess of Hazlewood had arrived for the season, that they had had their magnificent mansion refurnished, and that the beautiful duchess intended to startle all London by the splendor and variety of her entertainments.

He said to himself that it would be impossible for him to remain in town without seeing them—and see them of his own free will he never would again.

Fate was, however, too strong for him. He had decided that he would leave London rather than run the risk of meeting the Duchess of Hazlewood. He went one morning to a favorite exhibition of pictures, and the first person he saw in the gallery was the duchess herself. As their eyes met her face grew deadly pale, so pale that he thought she would faint and fall to the ground; her lips opened as though she would fain utter his name. To him she looked taller, more beautiful, more stately than ever—her superb costume suited her to perfection—yet he looked coldly into the depths of her dark eyes, and without a word or sign of greeting passed on.

He never knew whether she was hurt or not, but he decided that he would leave London at once. He was a sensitive man, more tender of heart than men as a rule, and their meeting had been a source of torture to him. He could not endure even the

thought that Philippa should have lost all claim to his respect. He decided to go to Tintagel, in wild, romantic Cornwall; at least there would be boating, fishing, and the glorious scenery.

"I must go somewhere," he said to himself—"I must do something. My life hangs heavy on my hands—how will it end?"

So in sheer weariness and desperation he went to Tintagel, having, as he thought, kept his determination to himself, as he wished no one to know whither he had retreated. One of the newspapers, however, heard of it, and in a little paragraph told that Lord Arleigh of Beechgrove had gone to Tintagel for the summer. That paragraph had one unexpected result.

It was the first of May. The young nobleman was thinking of the May days when he was a boy—of how the common near his early home was yellow with gorse, and the hedges were white with hawthorn. He strolled sadly along the sea-shore, thinking of the sunniest May he had known since then, the May before his marriage. The sea was unusually calm, the sky above was blue, the air mild and balmy, the white sea-gulls circled in the air, the waves broke with gentle murmur on the yellow sand.

He sat down on the sloping beach. They had nothing to tell him, those rolling, restless waves—no sweet story of hope or of love, no vague pleasant harmony. With a deep moan he bent his head as he thought of the fair young wife from whom he had parted for evermore, the beautiful loving girl who had clung to him so earnestly.

"Madaline, Madaline!" he cried aloud: and the waves seemed to take up the cry—they seemed to repeat "Madaline" as they broke on the shore. "Madaline," the mild wind whispered. It was like the realization of a dream, when he heard his name murmured, and, turning, he saw his lost wife before him.

The next moment he had sprung to his feet, uncertain at first whether it was really herself or some fancied vision.

"Madaline," he cried, "is it really you?"

"Yes; you must not be angry with me, Norman. See, we are quite alone; there is no one to see me speak to you, no one to reveal that we have met."

She trembled as she spoke; her face—to him more beautiful than ever—was raised to his with a look of unutterable appeal.

"You are not angry, Norman?"

"No, I am not angry. Do not speak to me as though I were a tyrant. Angry—and with you, Madaline—always my best beloved—how could that be?"

"I knew that you were here," she said. "I saw in a newspaper that you were going to Tintagel for the summer. I had

been longing to see you again—to see you, while unseen myself; so I came hither."

"My dear Madaline, to what purpose?" he asked, sadly.

"I felt that if I did not look upon your face I should die—that I could live no longer without seeing you. Such a terrible fever seemed to be burning my very life away. My heart yearned for the touch of your hand. So I came. You are not angry that I came?"

"No, not angry; but, my darling, it will be harder for us to part."

"I have been here in Tintagel for two whole days," she continued. "I have seen you, but this is the first time you have gone where I could follow. Now speak to me, Norman. Say something to me that will cure my terrible pain—that will take the weary aching from my heart. Say something that will make me stronger to bear my desolate life—braver to live without you. You are wiser, better, stronger, braver than I. Teach me to bear my fate."

What could he say? Heaven help them both—what could he say? He looked with dumb, passionate sorrow into her fair loving face.

"You must not think it unwomanly in me to come," she said. "I am you wife—there is no harm in my coming. If I were not your wife, I would sooner have drowned myself than return after you had sent me away."

Her face was suffused with a crimson blush.

"Norman," she said gently, "sit down here by my side, and I will tell you why I have come."

They sat down side by side on the beach. There was only the wide blue sky above, only the wide waste of restless waters at their feet, only a circling sea-gull near—no human being to watch the tragedy of love and pride played out by the sea waves.

"I have come," she said, "to make one more appeal to you, Norman—to ask you to change this stern determination which is ruining your life and mine—to ask you to take me back to your home and your heart. For I have been thinking, dear, and I do not see that the obstacle is such as you seem to imagine. It was a terrible wrong, a great disgrace—it was a cruel deception, a fatal mistake; but, after all, it might be overlooked. Moreover, Norman, when you made me your wife, did you not promise to love and to cherish, to protect me and make me happy until I died?"

"Yes," he replied, briefly.

"Then how are you keeping that promise—a promise made in the sight of Heaven?"

Lord Arleigh looked down at the fair, pure face, a strange light glowing in his own.

"My dear Madaline," he said, "you must not overlook what the honor of my race demands. I have my own ideas of what is due to my ancestors; and I cannot think that I have sinned by broken vows. I vowed to love you—so I do, my darling, ten thousand times better than anything else on earth. I vowed to be true and faithful to you—so I am, for I would not even look at another woman's face. I vowed to protect you and to shield you—so I do, my darling; I have surrounded you with luxury and ease."

What could she reply—what urge or plead?

"So, in the eyes of Heaven, my wife, I cannot think I am wronging you."

"Then," she said, humbly, "my coming here, my pleading, is in vain."

"Not in vain, my darling. Even the sight of you for a few minutes has been like a glimpse of Elysium."

"And I must return," she said, "as I came—with my love thrown back, my prayers unanswered, my sorrow redoubled."

She hid her face in her hands and wept aloud. Presently she bent forward.

"Norman," she said, in a low whisper, "my darling, I appeal to you for my own sake. I love you so dearly that I cannot live away from you—it is a living death. You cannot realize it. There are few moments, night or day, in which your face is not before me—few moments in which I do not hear your voice. Last night I dreamed that you stood before me with outstretched arms and called me. I went to you, and you clasped me in your arms. You said, 'My darling wife, it has all been a mistake—a terrible mistake—and I am come to ask your pardon and to take you home.' In my dream, Norman, you kissed my face, my lips, my hands, and called me by every loving name you could invent. You were so kind to me, and I was so happy. And the dream was so vivid, Norman, that even after I awoke I believed it to be reality. Then I heard the sobbing of the waves on the beach, and I cried out, 'Norman, Norman!' thinking you were still near me; but there was no reply. It was only the silence that roused me to a full sense that my happiness was a dream. There was no husband with kind words and tender kisses. I thought my heart would have broken. And then I said to myself that I could live no longer without making an effort once more to change your decision. Oh, Norman, for my sake, do not send me back to utter desclation and despair! Do not send me back to coldness and darkness, to sorrow and tears! Let me be near you! You have a thousand interests in life—I have but one. You can live without love, I cannot. Oh, Nor-

man, for my sake, for my love's sake, for my happiness' sake, take me back, dear—take me back!"

The golden head dropped forward and fell on his breast, her hands clung to him with almost despairing pain.

"I will be so humble, darling. I can keep away from all observation. It is only to be with you that I wish—only to be near you. You cannot be hard—you cannot send me away; you will not, for I love you!"

Her hands clung more closely to him.

"Many men have forgiven their wives even great crimes, and have taken them back after the basest desertion. Overlook my father's crime and pardon me, for Heaven's dear sake!"

"My dearest Madaline, if you would but understand! I have nothing to pardon. You are sweetest, dearest, loveliest, best. You are one of the purest and noblest of women. I have nothing to pardon; it is only that I cannot take disgrace into my family. I cannot give to my children an inheritance of crime."

"But, Norman," said the girl, gently, "because my father was a felon, that does not make me one—because he was led into wrong, it does not follow that I must do wrong. Insanity may be hereditary, but surely crime is not; besides, I have heard my father say that his father was an honest, simple, kindly northern farmer. My father had much to excuse him. He was a handsome man, who had been flattered and made much of."

"My darling I could not take your hands into mine and kiss them so, if I fancied that they were ever so slightly tainted with sin."

"Then why not take me home, Norman?"

"I cannot," he replied, in a tone of determination. "You must not torture me, Madaline, with further pleading. I cannot—that is sufficient."

He rose and walked with rapid steps down the shore. How hard it was, how terrble—bitter almost as the anguish of death!

She was by his side again, walking in silence. He would have given the whole world if he could have taken her into his arms and have kissed back the color into her sad young face.

"Norman," said a low voice, full of bitterest pain, "I am come to say good-by. I am sorry I have done harm—not good. I am sorry—forgive me, and say good-by."

"It has made our lot a thousand times harder, Madaline," he returned, hoarsely.

"Never mind the hardship; you will soon recover from that," she said. "I am sorry that I have acted against your wishes, and broken the long silence. I will never do it again, Norman."

"Never, unless you are ill and need me," he supplemented. "Then you have promised to send for me."

"I will do so," she said. "You will remember, dear hus-

band, that my last words to you were 'Good-by, and Heaven bless you.'"

The words died away on her lips. He turned aside lest she should see the trembling of his face; he never complained to her. He knew now that she thought him hard, cold, unfeeling, indifferent—that she thought his pride greater than his love; but even that was better than that she should know he suffered more than she did—she must never know that.

When he turned back from the tossing waves and the summer sun she was gone. He looked across the beach—there was no sign of her. She was gone; and he avowed to himself that it would be wonderful if ever in this world he saw her again. She did not remain at Tintagel; to do so would be useless, hopeless. She saw it now. She had hoped against hope; she had said to herself that in a year and a half he would surely have altered his mind—he would have found now how hard it was to live alone, to live without love—he would have found that there was something dearer in the world than family pride—he would have discovered that love outweighed everything else. Then she saw that her anticipations were all wrong—he preferred his dead ancestors to his living wife.

She went back to Winiston House and took up the dreary round of life again. She might have made her lot more endurable and happier, she might have traveled, have sought society and amusement; but she had no heart for any of these things. She had spent the year and a half of her lonely married life in profound study, thinking to herself that if he should claim her he would be pleased to find her yet more accomplished and educated. She was indefatigable, and it was all for him.

Now that she was going back, she was without this mainspring of hope—her old studies and pursuits wearied her. To what end and for what purpose had been all her study, all her hard work? He would never know of her proficiency; and she would not care to study for any other object than to please him.

"What am I to do with my life," she moaned. "Mariana in the moated grange was not more to be pitied than I."

How often the words occurred to her:

"The day is dreary,
'He cometh not,' she said:
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead.'"

It was one of the strangest, dullest, saddest lives that human being ever led. That she wearied of it was no wonder. She was tired of the sorrow, the suffering, the despair—so tired that after a time she fell ill; and then she lay longing for death.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was a glorious September, and the Scottish moors looked as they had not looked for years; the heather grew in rich profusion, the grouse were plentiful. The prospects for sportsmen were excellent.

Not knowing what else to do, Lord Arleigh resolved to go to Scotland for the shooting; there was a sort of savage satisfaction in the idea of living so many weeks alone, without on-lookers, where he could be dull if he liked without comment—where he could lie for hours together on the heather looking up at the blue skies, and puzzling over the problem of his life—where, when the fit of despair seized him, he could indulge in it, and no one wonder at him. He hired a shooting-lodge called Glaburn. In his present state of mind it seemed to him to be a relief to live where he could not even see a woman's face. Glaburn was kept in order by two men, who mismanaged it after the fashion of men, but Lord Arleigh was happier there than he had been since his fatal marriage-day, simply because he was quite alone. If he spent more time in lying on the heather and thinking of Madaline than he did in shooting, that was his own concern—there was no one to interfere.

One day, when he was in one of his most despairing moods, he went out quite early in the morning, determined to wander the day through, to exhaust himself pitilessly with fatigue, and then see if he could not rest without dreaming of Madaline. But as he wandered east and west, knowing little and caring less, whither he went, a violent storm, such as breaks at times over the Scottish moors, overtook him. The sky grew dark as night, the rain fell in a torrent—blinding, thick, heavy—he could hardly see his hand before him. He wandered on for hours, wet through, weary, cold, yet rather rejoicing than otherwise in his fatigue. Presently hunger was added to fatigue; and then the matter became more serious—he had no hope of being able to find his way home, for he had no idea in what direction he had strayed.

At last he grew alarmed; life did not hold much for him, it was true, but he had no desire to die on those lonely wilds, without a human being near him. Then it became painful for him to walk; his fatigue was so great that his limbs ached at every step. He began to think his life was drawing near its close. Once or twice he had cried "Madaline" aloud, and the name seemed to die away on the sobbing wind.

He grew exhausted at last; for some hours he had struggled on in the face of the tempest.

"I shall have to lie down like a dog by the road-side and die," he thought to himself.

No other fate seemed to be before him but that, and he told himself that after all he had sold his life cheaply. "Found dead on the Scotch moors," would be the verdict about him.

What would the world say? What would his golden-haired darling say when she heard that he was dead?

As the hot tears blinded his eyes—tears for Madaline, not for himself—a light suddenly flashed into them, and he found himself quite close to the window of a house. With a deep-drawn, bitter sob, he whispered to himself that he was saved. He had just strength enough to knock at the door; and when it was opened he fell across the threshold, too faint and exhausted to speak, a sudden darkness before his eyes.

When he had recovered a little, he found that several gentlemen were gathered around him, and that one of them was holding a flask of whisky to his lips.

"That was a narrow escape," said a cheery, musical voice. "How long have you been on foot?"

"Since eight this morning," he replied.

"And now it is nearly eight at night! Well, you may thank Heaven for preserving your life."

Lord Arleigh turned away with a sigh. How little could any one guess what life meant for him—life spent without love—love—without Madaline!

"I have known several lose their lives in this way," continued the same voice. "Only last year poor Charley Hartigan was caught in a similar storm, and he lay for four days dead before he was found. This gentleman has been fortunate."

Lord Arleigh roused himself and looked around. He found himself the center of observation. The room in which he was lying was large and well furnished, and from the odor of tobacco it was plainly used as a smoking-room.

Over him leaned a tall, handsome man, whose hair was slightly tinged with gray.

"I think," he said, "you are my neighbor, Lord Arleigh? I have often seen you on the moors."

"I do not remember you," Lord Arleigh returned; "nor do I know where I am."

"Then let me introduce myself as the Earl of Mountdean," said the gentleman. "You are at Rosorton, a shooting-lodge belonging to me, and I beg that you will make yourself at home."

Every attention was paid to him. He was placed in a warm

bed, some warm, nourishing soup was brought to him, and he was left to rest.

"The Earl of Mountdean." Then this was the tall figure he had seen striding over the hills—this was the neighbor he had shunned and avoided, preferring solitude. How kind he was, and how his voice affected him! It was like long-forgotten melody. He asked himself whether he had seen the earl anywhere. He could not remember. He could not recall to his mind that they had ever met, yet he had most certainly heard his voice. He fell asleep thinking of this, and dreamed of Madaline all night long.

In the morning the earl came himself to his room to make inquiries; and then Lord Arleigh liked him better than ever. He would not allow his guest to rise.

"Remember," he said, "prevention is better than cure. After the terrible risk you have run, it will not do for you to be rash. You must rest."

So Lord Arleigh took the good advice given to him to lay still, but on the second day he rose, declaring that he could stand no further confinement. Even then Lord Mountdean would not hear of his going.

"I am compelled to be despotic with you," he said. "I know that at Glaburn you have no housekeeper, only men-servants—and they cannot make you comfortable, I am sure. Stay here for a few days until you are quite well."

So Lord Arleigh allowed himself to be persuaded, saying, with a smile, that he had come to Glaburn purposely for solitude.

"It was for the same thing that I came here," said the earl. "I have had a great sorrow in my life, and I like sometimes to be alone to think about it."

The two men looked at each other, but they liked each other all the better for such open confession.

When a few days had passed, it was Lord Arleigh who felt unwilling to leave his companion. He had never felt more at home than he did with Lord Mountdean. He had met no one so simple, so manly, so intelligent, and at the same time such a good fellow. There were little peculiarities in the earl, too, that struck him very forcibly; they seemed to recall some faint, vague memory, a something that he could never grasp, that was always eluding him, yet that was perfectly clear; and he was completely puzzled.

"Have I ever met you before?" he asked the earl one day.

"I do not think so. I have no remembrance of ever having seen you."

"Your voice and face are familiar to me," the younger man

continued. "One or two of your gestures are as well known to me as though I had lived with you for years."

"Remembrances of that kind sometimes strike me," said the earl—"a mannerism, a something that one cannot explain. I should say that you have seen some one like me, perhaps."

It was probable enough, but Lord Arleigh was not quite satisfied. The earl and his guest parted in the most friendly manner.

"I shall never be quite so much in love with solitude again," said Lord Arleigh, as they were parting; "you have taught me that there is something better."

"I have learned the same lesson from you," responded the earl, with a sigh. "You talk about solitude. I had not been at Rosorton ten days before a party of four, all friends of mine, proposed to visit me. I could not refuse. They left the day after you came."

"I did not see them," said Lord Arleigh.

"No, I did not ask them to prolong their stay, fearing that after all those hours on the moors, you might have a serious illness; but now, Lord Arleigh, you will promise me that we shall be friends."

"Yes," he replied, "we will be friends."

So it was agreed that they should be strangers no longer—that they should visit and exchange neighborly courtesies and civilities.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Earl of Mountdean and Lord Arleigh were walking up a steep hill one day together, when the former feeling tired, they both sat down among the heather to rest. There was a warm sun shining, a pleasant wind blowing, and the purple heather seemed literally to dance around them. They remained for some time in silence; it was the earl who broke it by saying:

"How beautiful the heather is! And here indeed on this hill-top is solitude! We might fancy ourselves quite alone in the world. By the way, you have never told me, Arleigh, what it is that makes you so fond of solitude."

"I have had a great trouble," he replied, briefly.

"A trouble! But one suffers a great deal before losing all interest in life. You are so young, you cannot have suffered much."

"I know no other life so utterly helpless as my own."

The earl looked at him thoughtfully.

"I should like to know what your trouble is?" he said gently.

"I can tell you only one half of it," was the reply. "I fell in love with one of the sweetest, fairest, purest of girls. How I loved her is only known to myself. I suppose every man thinks his own love the greatest and the best. My whole heart went out to this girl—with my whole soul I loved her! She was below me in the one matter of worldly wealth and position—above me in all other. When I first asked her to marry me, she refused. She told me that the difference in our rank was too great. She was most noble, most self-sacrificing; she loved me, I know, most dearly, but she refused me. I was for some time unable to overcome her opposition; at last I succeeded. I tell you no details either of her name or where she lived, nor any other circumstances connected with her—I tell you only this, that, once having won her consent to our marriage, I seemed to have exchanged earth for Elysium. Then we were married, not publicly and with great pomp, but as my darling wished—privately and quietly. On the same day—my wedding-day—I took her home. I cannot tell how great was my happiness—no one could realize it. Believe me, Lord Mountdean, that she herself is as pure as a saint, that I know no other woman at once so meek and so lofty, so noble and so humble. Looking at her, one feels how true and sweet a woman's soul can be. Yet—oh, that I should live to say it!—on my wedding-day I discovered something—it was no fault of hers, I swear—that parted us. Loving her blindly, madly, with my whole heart and soul, I was still compelled to leave her. She is my wife in name only, and can never be more to me, yet, you understand, without any fault of hers."

"What a strange story!" said the earl, thoughtfully. "But this barrier, this obstacle—can it never be removed?"

"No," answered Lord Arleigh, "never!"

"I assure you of my deepest sympathy," said the earl. "It is a strange history."

"Yes, and a sad fate," sighed Lord Arleigh. "You cannot understand my story entirely. Wanting a full explanation, you might fairly ask me why I married with this drawback. I did not know of it, but my wife believed I did. We were both most cruelly deceived, it does not matter now. She is condemned to a loveless, joyless life; so am I. With a wife beautiful, loving, young, I must lead a most solitary existence—I must see my name die out for want of heirs—I must see my race almost extinct, my life passed in repining and misery, my heart broken, my days without sunshine. I repeat that it is a sad fate."

"It is indeed," agreed the earl—"and such a strange one. Are you quite sure that nothing can be done to remedy it?"

"Quite sure," was the hopeless reply.

"I can hardly understand the need for separation, seeing that the wife herself is blameless."

"In this case it is unavoidable."

"May I, without seeming curious, ask you a question?" said the earl.

"Certainly—as many as you like."

"You can please yourself about answering it," observed the earl; and then he added: "Tell me, is it a case of insanity? Has your wife any hereditary tendency to anything of that kind?"

"No," replied Lord Arleigh; "it is nothing of that description. My wife is to me perfect in body and mind; I can add nothing to that."

"Then your story is a marvel; I do not—I cannot understand it. Still I must say that, unless there is something far deeper and more terrible than I can imagine, you have done wrong to part from your wife."

"I wish I could think so. But my doom is fixed, and no matter how long I live, or she lives, it can never be altered."

"My story is a sad one," observed Lord Mountdean, "but it is not so sad as yours. I married when I was quite young—married against my father's wish, and without his consent. The lady I loved was like your own; she was below me in position, but in nothing else. She was the daughter of a clergyman, a lady of striking beauty, good education and manners. I need not trouble you by telling you how it came about. I married her against my father's wish; he was in Italy at the time for his health—he had been there indeed for some years. I married her privately; our secret was well kept. Some time after our marriage I received a telegram stating that my father was dying and wished to see me. At that very time we were expecting the birth of what we hoped would be a son and heir. But I was anxious that my father should see and bless my wife before he died. She assured me that the journey would not hurt her, that no evil consequences would ensue; and, as I longed intensely for my father to see her, it was arranged that we should go together. A few hours of the journey passed happily enough, and then my poor wife was taken ill. Heaven pardon me because of my youth, my ignorance, my inexperience! I think sometimes that I might have saved her—but it is impossible to tell. We stopped at a little town called Castledene, and I drove to the hotel. There were races, or something of the kind, going on in the neighborhood, and the proprietors could not accom-

modate us. I drove to the doctor, who was a good Samaritan; he took us into his house—my child was born, and my wife died there. It was not a son and heir, as we had hoped it might be, but a little daughter, as fair as her mother. Ah, Lord Arleigh, you have had your troubles, I have had mine. My wife was buried at Castledene—my beautiful young wife, whom I loved so dearly. I left my child, under the doctor's care, with a nurse, having arranged to pay so much per annum for her, and intending when I returned to England to take her home to Wood Lynton as my heiress. My father, contrary to the verdict of the physicians, lingered about three years. Then he died, and I became Earl of Mountdean. The first thing I did was to hurry to Castledene. Can you imagine my horror when I found that all trace of my child was lost? The poor doctor had met with some terrible death, and the woman who had charge of my little one had left the neighborhood. Can you imagine what this blow was to me? Since then my life has been spent in one unceasing effort to find my daughter."

"How strange!" said Lord Arleigh. "Did you not know the name of the nurse?"

"Yes, she lived at a little place called Ashwood. I advertised for her, I offered large rewards, but I have never gleaned the least news of her; no one could ever find her. Her husband, it appeared, had been guilty of crime. My opinion is that the poor woman fled in shame from the neighborhood where she was known, and that both she and my dear child are dead."

"It seems most probable," observed Lord Arleigh.

"If I could arrive at any certainty as to her fate," said the earl, "I should be a happier man. I have been engaged to my cousin Lady Lily Gordon for four years, but I cannot make up my mind to marry until I hear something certain about my daughter."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Winiston House was prettily situated. The house stood in the midst of charming grounds. There was a magnificent garden, full of flowers, full of fragrance and bloom; there was an orchard filled with rich, ripe fruit, broad meadow-land where the cattle grazed, where daisies and oxlips grew. To the left of the house was a large shrubbery, which opened on to a wide carriage drive leading to the high road. The house was an old red-brick building, in no particular style of architecture, with large oriel windows and a square porch. The rooms were large, lofty,

and well lighted. Along the western side of the house ran a long terrace called the western terrace; there the sun appeared to shine brightest, there tender plants flourished, there tame white doves came to be fed and a peacock walked in majesty; from there one heard the distant rush of the river.

There Lady Arleigh spent the greater part of her time—there she wore her gentle life away. Three years had elapsed, and no change had come to her. She read of her husband's sojourn in Scotland. Then she read in the fashionable intelligence that he had gone to Wood Lynton, the seat of the Earl of Mountdean. He remained there three days, and then went abroad. Where he was now she did not know; doubtless he was traveling from one place to another, wretched, unhappy as she was herself.

The desolate, dreary life had begun to prey upon her at last. She had fought against it bravely for some time—she had tried to live down the sorrow; but it was growing too strong for her—the weight of it was wearing her life away. Slowly but surely she began to fade and droop. At first it was but a failure in strength—a little walk tired her, the least fatigue or exercise seemed too much for her. Then, still more slowly, the exquisite bloom faded from the lovely face, a weary languor shone in the dark-blue eyes, the crimson lips lost their color. Yet Lady Arleigh grew more beautiful as she grew more fragile. Then all appetite failed her. Mrs. Burton declared that she ate nothing.

She might have led a different life—she might have gone out into society—she might have visited and entertained guests. People knew that Lady Arleigh was separated from her husband; they knew also that, whatever might have been the cause of separation, it had arisen from no fault of hers. She would, in spite of her strange position, have been welcomed with open arms by the whole neighborhood, but she was sick with mortal sorrow—life had not a charm for her.

She had no words for visitors—she had no wish left for enjoyment. Just to dream her life away was all she cared for. The disappointment was so keen, so bitter, she could not overcome it. Death would free Norman from all burden—would free him from this tie that must be hateful to him. Death was no foe to be met and fought with inch by inch; he was rather a friend who was to save her from the embarrassment of living on—a friend who would free her husband from the effects of his terrible mistake.

When her strengh began to fail her, when she grew languid, feeble, fragile, there was no sustaining power, no longing for life, no desire to combat grim death, no hopeful looking for the return of her old buoyancy. Slowly, gradually, surely she was fading away, after the manner of a bright flower deprived of sunshine and dew.

Madaline had never sent for her mother, not knowing whether Lord Arleigh would like it; but she had constantly written to her, and had forwarded money to her. She had sent her more than Margaret Dornham was willing to accept. Another thing she had done—she had most carefully refrained from saying one word to her mother as to the cause of her separation from her husband. Indeed, Margaret Dornham had no notion of the life that her well-beloved Madaline was leading.

It had been a terrible struggle for Margaret to give her up.

"I might as well have let her go back years ago to those to whom she belonged," she said to herself, "as to let her go now."

Still, she stood in great awe of the Duchess of Hazlewood, who seemed to her one of the grandest ladies in all England; and, when the duchess told her it was selfish of her to stand in her daughter's light, Margaret gave way and let her go. Many times, after she had parted with her, she felt inclined to open the oaken box with brass clasps, and see what the papers in it contained, but a nameless fear came over her. She did not dare to do what she had not done earlier.

Madaline had constantly written to her, had told her of her lover, had described Lord Arleigh over and over again to her. On the eve of her wedding-day she had written again; but, after that fatal marriage-day, she had not told her secret. Of what use would it be to make her mother more unhappy than she was —of what avail to tell her that the dark and terrible shadow of her father's crime had fallen over her young life, blighting it also?

Of all her mother's troubles she knew this would be the greatest, so she generously refrained from naming it. There was no need to tell her patient, long-suffering, unhappy mother that which must prove like a dagger in her gentle heart. So Margaret Dornham had one gleam of sunshine in her wretched life. She believed that the girl she had loved so dearly was unutterably happy. She had read the descriptions of Lord Arleigh with tears in her eyes.

"That is how girls write of the men they love," she said—"my Madaline loves him."

Madaline had written to her when the ceremony was over. She had no one to make happy with her news but her distant mother. Then some days passed before she heard again—that did not seem strange. There was, of course, the going home, the change of scene, the constant occupation. Madaline would write when she had time. At the end of a week she heard again; and then it struck her that the letter was dull, unlike one written by a happy bride—but of course she must be mistaken—why should not Madaline be happy?

After that the letters came regularly, and Madaline said that the greatest pleasure she had lay in helping her mother. She said that she intended to make her a certain allowance, which she felt quite sure would be continued to her after her death, should that event precede her mother's; so that at last, for the weary-hearted woman, came an interval of something like contentment. Through Madaline's bounty she was able to move from her close lodgings in town to a pretty cottage in the country. Then she had a glimpse of content.

After a time her heart yearned to see the daughter of her adoption, the one sunbeam of her life, and she wrote to that effect.

"I will come to you," wrote Madaline, in reply, "if you will promise me faithfully to make no difference between me and the child Madaline who used to come home from school years ago."

Margaret promised, and Madaline, plainly dressed, went to see her mother. It was sweet, after those long, weary months of humiliation and despair, to lay her head on that faithful breast and hear whispered words of love and affection. When the warmth of their first greeting was over, Margaret was amazed at the change in her child. Madaline had grown taller, the girlish, graceful figure had developed into a model of perfect womanhood. The dress that she wore became her so well that the change in the marvelous face amazed her the most, it was so wonderfully wonderful, so fair, so pure, so *spirituelle*, yet it had so strange a story written upon it—a story she could neither read nor understand. It was not a happy face. The eyes were shadowed, the lips firm, the radiance and brightness that had distinguished her were gone; there were patience and resignation instead.

"How changed you are, my darling!" said Margaret, as she looked at her. "Who would have thought that my little girl would grow into a tall, stately, beautiful lady, dainty and exquisite? What did Lord Arleigh say to your coming, my darling?"

"He did not say anything," she replied, slowly.

"But was he not grieved to lose you?"

"Lord Arleigh is abroad," said Madaline, gently. "I do not expect that he will return to England just yet."

"Abroad!" repeated Margaret. "Then, my darling, how is it that you are not with him?"

"I could not go," she replied, evasively.

"And you love your husband very much, Madaline, do you not?" inquired Margaret.

"Yes, I love him with all my heart and soul!" was the earnest reply.

"Thank Heaven that my darling is happy!" said Margaret. "I shall find everything easier to bear now that I know that."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Margaret Dornham was neither a clever nor a far-seeing woman; had she been either, she would never have acted as she did. She would have known that in taking little Madaline from Castledene she was destroying her last chance of ever being owned or claimed by her parents; she would have understood that, although she loved the child very dearly, she was committing a most cruel act. But she thought only of how she loved her. Yet, undiscerning as she was, she was puzzled about her daughter's happiness. If she was really so happy, why did she spend long hours in reverie—why sit with folded hands, looking with such sad eyes at the passing clouds? That did not look like happiness. Why those heavy sighs, and the color that went and came like light and shade? It was strange happiness. After a time she noticed that Madaline never spoke voluntarily of her husband. She would answer any questions put to her—she would tell her mother anything she desired to know; but of her own accord she never once named him. That did not look like happiness. She even once, in answer to her mother's questions, described Beechgrove to her—told her of the famous beeches, the grand picture gallery; she told her of the gorgeous Titian—the woman with rubies like blood shining on her white neck. But she did not add that she had been at Beechgrove only once, and had left the place in sorrow and shame.

She seemed to have every comfort, every luxury; but Margagaret noticed also that she never spoke of her circle of society—that she never alluded to visitors.

"It seems to me, my darling, that you lead a very quiet life," she said, one day; and Madaline's only answer was that such was really the case.

Another time Margaret said to her:

"You do not write many letters to your husband, Madaline. I could imagine a young wife like you writing every day," and her daughter made no reply.

On another occasion Mrs. Dornham put the question to her:

"You are quite sure, Madaline, that you love your husband?"

"Love him!" echoed the girl, her face lighting up—"love him, mother? I think no one in the wide world has ever loved another better!"

"Such being the case, my darling," said Margaret, anxiously, "let me ask you if you are quite sure he loves you?"

No shadow came into the blue eyes as she raised them to her mother's face.

"I am as sure of it," she replied, "as I am of my own existence."

"Then," thought Margaret to herself, "I am mistaken; all is well between them."

Madaline did not intend to remain very long with her mother, but it was soothing to the wounded, aching heart to be loved so dearly. Margaret startled her one day, by saying:

"Madaline, now that you are a great lady, and have such influential friends, do you not think you could do something for your father?"

"Something for my father?" repeated the girl, with a shudder. "What can I do for him?"

A new idea suddenly occurred to Mrs. Dornham. She looked into Lady Arleigh's pale, beautiful face.

"Madaline," she said, earnestly, "tell me the whole truth—is your father's misfortune any drawback to you? Tell me the truth; I have a reason for asking you."

But Lady Arleigh would not pain her mother—her quiet, simple heart had ached bitterly enough. She would not add one pang.

"Tell me, dear," continued Margaret, earnestly; "you do not know how important it is for me to understand."

"My dear mother," said Lady Arleigh, gently clasping her arms round her mother's neck; "do not let that idea make you uneasy. All minor lights cease to shine, you know, in the presence of greater ones. The world bows down to Lord Arleigh; very few, I think, know what his wife's name was. Be quite happy about me, mother. I am sure that no one who has seen me since my marriage knows anything about my father."

"I shall be quite happy, now that I know that," she observed.

More than once during that visit Margaret debated within herself whether she would tell Lady Arleigh her story or not; but the same weak fear that had caused her to run away with the child, lest she should lose her now, made her refrain from speaking, lest Madaline, on knowing the truth, should be angry with her and forsake her.

If Mrs. Dornham had known the harm that her silence was doing she would quickly have broken it.

Lady Arleigh returned home, taking her silent sorrows with her. If possible, she was kinder then ever afterward to her mother, sending her constantly baskets of fruit and game—presents of every kind. If it had not been for the memory of

her convict husband, Mrs. Dornham would for the first time in her life have been quite happy.

Then it was that Lady Arleigh began slowly to droop, then it was that her desolate life became utterly intolerable—that her sorrow became greater than she could bear. She must have some one near her, she felt—some one with whom she could speak—or she should go mad. She longed for her mother. It was true Margaret Dornham was not an educated woman, but in her way she was refined. She was gentle, tender-hearted, thoughtful, patient, above all, Madaline believed she was her mother—and she had never longed for her mother's love and care as she did now, when health, strength, and life seemed to be failing her.

By good fortune she happened to see in the daily papers that Lord Arleigh was staying at Meurice's Hotel, in Paris. She wrote to him there, and told him that she had a great longing to have her mother with her. She told him that she had desired this for a long time, but that she had refained from expressing the wish lest it should be displeasing to him.

"Do not scruple to refuse me," she said, "if you do not approve. I hardly venture to hope that you will give your consent. If you do, I will thank you for it. If you should think it best to refuse it, I submit humbly as I submit now. Let me add that I would not ask the favor but that my health and strength are failing fast."

Lord Arleigh mused long and anxiously over this letter. He hardly cared that her mother should go to Dower House; it would perhaps be the means of his unhappy secret becoming known. Nor did he like to refuse Madaline, unhappy, lonely, and ill. Dear Heaven, if he could but go to her himself and comfort her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Long and anxiously did Lord Arleigh muse over his wife's letter. What was he to do? If her mother was like the generality of her class, then he was quite sure that the secret he had kept would be a secret no longer—there was no doubt of that. She would naturally talk, and the servants would prove the truth of the story, and there would be a terrible *exposé*. Yet, lonely and sorrowful as Madaline declared herself to be, how could he refuse her? It was an anxious question for him, and one that caused him much serious thought. Had he known how ill she was he would not have hesitated a moment.

He wrote to Madaline—how the letter was received and cherished no one but herself knew—and told her that he would be in England in a day or two, and would then give her a decided answer. The letter was kind and affectionate; it came to her hungry heart like dew to a thirsty flower.

A sudden idea occurred to Lord Arleigh. He would go to England and find out all about the unfortunate man Dornham. Justice had many victims; it was within the bounds of possibility that the man might have been innocent—might have been unjustly accused. If such—and oh, how he hoped it might be! —should prove to be the case, then Lord Arleigh felt that he could take his wife home. It was the real degradation of the crime that he dreaded so utterly—dreaded more than all that could ever be said about it. He thought to himself more than once that, if by any unexpected means he discovered that Henry Dornham was innocent of the crime attributed to him, he would in that same hour ask Madaline to forgive him, and to be the mistress of his house. That was the only real solution of the difficulty that ever occurred to him. If the man were but innocent, he—Lord Arleigh—would never heed the poverty, the obscurity, the humble name—all that was nothing. By comparison it seemed so little that he could have smiled at it. People might say it was a low marriage, but he had his own idea of what was low. If only the man could be proved innocent of crime, then he might go to his sweet, innocent wife, and clasping her in his arms, take her to his heart.

The idea seemed to haunt him—it seemed to have a fatal attraction for him. He resolved to go to London at once and see if anything could be done in the matter. How he prayed and longed and hoped! He passed through well-nigh every stage of feeling—from the bright rapture of hope to the lowest depths of despair. He went first to Scotland Yard, and had a long interview with the detective who had given evidence against Henry Dornham. The detective's idea was that he was emphatically "a bad lot."

He smiled benignly when Lord Arleigh suggested that possibly the man was innocent, remarking that it was very kind of the gentleman to think so; for his own part he did not see a shadow of a chance of it.

"He was caught, you see, with her grace's jewels in his pocket, and gold and silver plate ready packed by his side—that did not look much like innocence."

"No, certainly not," Lord Arleigh admitted; "but then there have been cases in which circumstances looked even worse against an innocent man."

"Yes"—the detective admitted it, seeing that for some reason

or other his lordship had a grest desire to make the man out innocent.

"He will have a task," the detective told himself, grimly.

To the inquiry as to whether the man had been sent out of England the answer was "No; he is at Chatham."

To Chatham Lord Arleigh resolved to go. For one in his position there would not be much difficulty in obtaining an interview with the convict. And before Long Lord Arleigh, one of the proudest men in England, and Henry Dornham, poacher and thief, stood face to face.

Lord Arleigh's first feeling was one of great surprise—Henry Dornham was so different from what he had expected to find him; he had not thought that he would be fair like Madaline, but he was unprepared for the dark, swarthy, gypsy-like type of the man before him.

The two looked steadily at each other; the poacher did not seem in the least to stand in awe of his visitor. Lord Arleigh tried to read the secret of the man's guilt or innocence in his face. Henry Dornham returned the gaze fearlessly.

"What do you want with me?" he asked. "You are what we call a swell. I know by the look of you. What do you want with me?"

The voice, like the face, was peculiar, not unpleasant—deep, rich, with a clear tone, yet not in the least like Madaline's voice.

"I want," said Lord Arleigh, steadily, "to be your friend, if you will let me."

"My friend!" a cynical smile curled the handsome lips. "Well, that is indeed a novelty. I should like to ask, if it would not seem rude, what kind of a friend can a gentleman like you be to me?"

"You will soon find out," said Lord Arleigh.

"I have never known a friendship between a rich man and a ne'er-do-well like myself which did not end in harm for the poorer man. You seek us only when you want us—and then it is for no good."

"I should not be very likely to seek you from any motive but the desire to help you," observed Lord Arleigh.

"It is not quite clear to me how I am to be helped," returned the convict with a cynical smile; "but if you can do anything to get me out of this wretched place, please do."

"I want you to answer me a few questions." said Lord Arleigh—"and very much depends on them. To begin, tell me, were you innocent or guilty of the crime for which you are suffering? Is your punishment deserved or not?"

"Well," replied Henry Dornham, with a sullen frown, "I can just say this—it is well there are strong bars between us; if there were not you would not live to ask such another question."

"Will you answer me?" said Lord Arleigh, gently.

"No, I will not—why should I? You belong to a class I hate and detest—a class of tyrants and oppressors."

"Why should you? I will tell you in a few words. I am interested in the fate of your wife and daughter."

"My what?" cried the convict, with a look of wonder.

"Your wife and daughter," said Lord Arleigh.

"My daughter!" exclaimed the man. "Good Heaven! Oh, I see! Well, go on. You are interested in my wife and daughter—what else?"

"There is one thing I can do which would not only be of material benefit to them, but would make your daughter very happy. It cannot be done unless we can prove your innocence."

"Poor little Madaline," said the convict, quietly—"poor, pretty little girl!"

Lord Arleigh's whole soul revolted on hearing this man speak so of his fair, young wife. That this man, with heavy iron bars separating him, as though he were a wild animal, from the rest of the world, should call his wife "poor, pretty little Madaline."

"I would give," said Lord Arleigh, "a great deal to find that your conviction had been a mistake. I know circumstances of that kind will and do happen. Tell me honestly, is there any, even the least probability, of finding out anything to your advantage?"

"Well," replied Henry Dornham, "I am a ne'er-do-well by nature. I was an idle boy, an idle youth, and an idle man. I poached when I had a chance. I lived on my wife's earnings. I went to the bad as deliberately as any one in the world did, but I do not remember that I ever told a willful lie."

There passed through Lord Arleigh's mind a wish that the Duchess of Hazlewood might have heard this avowal.

"I do not remember," the man said again, "that I have ever told a willful lie in my life. I will not begin now. You asked me if I was really guilty. Yes, I was—guilty just as my judges pronounced me to be!"

For a few minutes Lord Arleigh was silent; the disappointment was almost greater than he could bear. He had anticipated so much from this interview; and now by these deliberately spoken words his hopes were ended—he would never be able to take his beautiful young wife to his heart and home. The bitterness of the disappointment seemed almost greater than he could bear. He tried to recover himself, while Henry Dornham went on:

"The rich never have anything to do with the poor without harm comes of it. Why did they send me to the duke's house? Why did he try to patronize me? Why did he parade his gold and silver plate before my eyes?"

The passion of his words seemed to inflame him.

"Why," he continued angrily, "should he eat from silver while others were without bread? Why should his wife wear diamonds while mine cried with hunger and cold? I saw how unjust it was. Who placed his foot on my neck? Who made him my master and tyrant, patronizing me with his 'my good fellow' this and the other? What right had he to such abundance while I had nothing?"

"That which was his," said Lord Arleigh, bluntly, "at least was not yours to take."

"But I say it was! I helped myself before, and, if I were out of this place, having the chance, I would help myself again."

"That would be equally criminal," said Lord Arleigh, fearlessly; and again Henry Dornham laughed his cynical laugh.

"It is too late in the day for me to talk over these matters," said the convict. "When I roamed in the woods as a free man, I had my own ideas; prison has not improved them. I shall never make a reformed convict—not even a decent ticket-of-leave man. So if you have any thought of reclaiming me, rid your mind of it at once."

"It will be best to do so, I perceive," observed Lord Arleigh. "I had some little hope when I came in—I have none now."

"You do not mean to say, though, that I am not to be any the better off for your visit?" cried the man. "I do not know your name, but I can see what you are. Surely you will try to do something for me?"

"What can I do?" asked Lord Arleigh. "If you had been innocent—even if there had been what they call extenuating circumstances—I would have spent a fortune in the endeavor to set you free; but your confession renders me powerless."

"The only extenuating circumstance in the whole affair," declared the man, after a pause, "was that I wanted money, and took what I thought would bring it. So you would give a small fortune to clear me, eh?" he interrogated.

"Yes," was the brief reply.

The man looked keenly at him.

"Then you must indeed have a strong motive. It is not for my own sake, I suppose?" A new idea occurred to him. A sudden smile curled his lip. "I have it!" he said. "You are in love with my—with pretty little Madaline, and you want to marry her! If you could make me out innocent, you would marry her; if you cannot—what then? Am I right?"

All the pride of his nature rose in rebellion against this coarse speech. He, an Arleigh of Beechgrove, to hear this reprobate sneering at his love! His first impulse was an angry one, but he controlled himself. After all, it was Madaline's father—for Madaline's sake he would be patient.

"Am I right?" the prisoner repeated, with the same mocking smile.

"No," replied Lord Arleigh, "you are not right. There is no need for me to offer any explanation, and, as I have failed in my object, I will go."

"You might just as well tell me if you are in love with my little Madaline. I might make it worth your while to let me know."

It was with great difficulty that Lord Arleigh controlled his indignation; but he replied, calmly:

"I have nothing to tell you."

A look of disappointment came over the dark, handsome face.

"You can keep your secrets," he said—"so can I. If you will tell me nothing, neither shall I; but I might make it worth your while to trust me."

"I have nothing to confide," returned Lord Arleigh; "all I can say to you on leaving is that I hope you will come to your senses and repent of your past wickedness."

"I shall begin to think that you are a missionary in disguise," said Henry Dornham. "So you will not offer me anything for my secret?" he interrogated.

"No secret of yours could interest me," rejoined Lord Arleigh, abruptly, as he went away.

So, for the second time in his life, he was at the door of the mystery, yet it remained unopened. The first time was when he was listening to Lord Mountdean's story, when the mention of the name Dornham should lead to a denouement; the second was now, when, if he had listened to the convict, he would have heard that Madaline was not his child.

He left Chatham sick at heart. There was no help for him—his fate was sealed. Never, while he lived, could he make his beautiful wife his own truly—they were indeed parted for evermore. There remained to him to write that letter; should he consent to Madaline's mother living with her or should he not?

He reflected long and anxiously, and then having well weighed the matter he decided that he would not refuse his wife her request. He must run the risk, but he would not caution her.

He wrote to Madaline, and told her that he would be pleased if she were pleased, and that he hoped she would be happy with her mother, adding the caution that he trusted she would impress upon her mother the need of great reticence, and that she must not mention the unfortunate circumstances of the family to any creature living.

Madaline's answer touched him. She assured him that there was no fear—that her mother was to be implicitly trusted. She

told him also how entirely she had kept the secret of his separation from her, lest it should add to her mother's trouble.

"She will know now that I do not live with you, that I never see you, that we are as strangers, but she will never know the reason."

He was deeply moved. What a noble girl she was, bearing her troubles so patiently, and confiding them to no human soul!

Then he was compelled to go to Beechgrove—it was long since he had been there, and so much required attention, he was obliged to go, sorely against his will, for he dreaded the sight of the place, haunted as it was by the remembrance of the love and sorrow of his young wife. He avoided going as long as possible, but the place needed the attention of a master.

It was June when he went—bright, smiling, perfumed, sunny June—and Beechgrove was at its best; the trees were in full foliage, the green woods resounded with the song of birds, the gardens were filled with flowers, the whole estate was blooming and fair. He took up his abode there. It was soon noticed in the house that he avoided the picture-gallery—nothing ever induced him to enter it. More than once, as he was walking through the woods, his heart beat and his face flushed; there, beyond the trees lived his wife, his darling, from whom a fate more cruel than death had parted him. His wife! The longing to see her grew on him from day to day. She was so near him, yet so far away—she was so fair, yet her beauty must all fade and die; it was not for him.

In time he began to think it strange that he had never heard anything of her. He went about in the neighborhood, yet no one spoke of having seen her. He never heard of her being at church, nor did he ever meet her on the high-road. It was strange how completely a vail of silence and mystery had fallen over her.

When he had been some time at Beechgrove he received one morning a letter from the Earl of Mountdean, saying that he was in the neighborhood, and would like to call. Lord Arleigh was pleased at the prospect. There was deep and real cordiality between the two men—they thoroughly understood and liked each other; it was true that the earl was older by many years than Lord Arleigh, but that did not affect their friendship.

They enjoyed a few days together very much. One morning they rode through the woods—the sweet, fragrant, June woods—when, from between the trees, they saw the square turrets of the Dower House. Lord Mountdean stopped to admire the view.

"We are a long distance from Beechgrove," he said; "what is that pretty place?"

Lord Arleigh's face flushed hotly.

"That," he replied, "is the Dower House, where my wife lives."

The earl looked with great interest at Lady Arleigh's dwelling-place.

"It is very pretty," he said—"pretty and quiet; but it must be dull for a young girl. You said she was young, did you not?"

"Yes, she is years younger than I am," replied Lord Arleigh.

"Poor girl!" said the earl, pityingly; "it must be rather a sad fate—so young and beautiful, yet condemned all her life to live alone. Tell me, Arleigh, did you take advice before you separated yourself so abruptly from her?"

"No," replied Lord Arleigh, "I did not even seek it; the matter appeared plain enough to me."

"I should not like you to think me curious," pursued the earl. "We are true friends now, and we can trust each other. You have every confidence in me, and I have complete faith in you. I would intrust to you the dearest secret of my heart. Arleigh, tell me what I know you have told to no human being—the reason of your separation from the wife you love."

Lord Arleigh hesitated for one half minute.

"What good can it possibly do?" he said.

"I am a great believer in the good old proverb that two heads are better than one," replied the earl. "I think it is just possible that I might have some idea that has not occurred to you; I might see some way out of the difficulty, that has not yet presented itself to you. Please yourself about it; either trust me or not, as you will; but if you do trust me, rely upon it I shall find some way of helping you."

"It is a hopeless case," observed Lord Arleigh, sadly. "I am quite sure that even if you knew all about it, you would not see any comfort for me. For my wife's sake I hesitate to tell you, not for my own."

"Your wife's secret will be as safe with me as with yourself," said the earl.

"I never thought that it would pass my lips, but I do trust you," declared Lord Arleigh; "and if you can see any way to help me, I shall thank Heaven for the first day I met you. You must hold my wife blameless, Lord Mountdean," he went on. "She never spoke untruthfully, she never deceived me; but on our wedding-day I discovered that her father was a convict—a man of the lowest criminal type."

Lord Mountdean looked as he felt, shocked.

"But how," he asked, eagerly, "could you be so deceived?"

"That I can never tell you; it was an act of fiendish revenge—cruel, ruthless, treacherous. I cannot reveal the perpetrator. My wife did not deceive me, did not even know that I had been deceived; she thought, poor child, that I was acquainted with the whole of her father's story, but I was not. And now, Lord Mountdean, tell me, do you think I did wrong?"

He raised his care-worn, haggard face as he asked the question, and the earl was disturbed at sight of the terrible pain in it.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The reason of his separation from his wife revealed, Lord Arleigh again put the question:

"Do you think, Lord Mountdean, that I have done wrong?"

The earl looked at him.

"No," he replied, "I cannot say that you have."

"I loved her," continued Lord Arleigh, "but I could not make the daughter of a convict the mistress of my house, the mother of my children. I could not let my children point to a felon's cell as the cradle of their origin. I could not sully my name, outrage a long line of noble ancestors, by making my poor wife mistress of Beechgrove. Say, if the same thing had happened to you, would you not have acted in like manner?"

"I believe that I should," answered the earl, gravely.

"However dearly you might love a woman, you could not place your coronet on the brow of a convict's daughter," said Lord Arleigh. "I love my wife a thousand times better than my life, yet I could not make her mistress of Beechgrove."

"It was a cruel deception," observed the earl—"one that it is impossible to understand. She herself—the lady you have made your wife—must be quite as unhappy as yourself."

"If it be possible she is more so," returned Lord Arleigh; "but tell me, if I had appealed to you in the dilemma—if I had asked your advice—what would you have said to me?"

"I should have no resource but to tell you to act as you have done," replied the earl; "no matter what pain and sorrow it entailed, you could not have done otherwise."

"I thought you would agree with me. And now, Mountdean, tell me, do you see any escape from my difficulty?"

"I do not, indeed," replied the earl.

"I had one hope," resumed Lord Arleigh; "and that was that the father had perhaps been unjustly sentenced, or that he might

after all prove to be innocent. I went to see him—he is one of the convicts working at Chatham."

"You went to see him!" echoed the earl, in surprise.

"Yes; and I gave up all hope from the moment I saw him. He is simply a handsome reprobate. I asked him if it was true that he had committed the crime, and he answered me quite frank, 'Yes.' I asked him if there were any extenuating circumstances; he replied 'want of money.' When I had seen and spoken to him, I felt convinced that the step I had taken with regard to my wife was a wise one, however cruel it may have been. No man in his senses would voluntarily admit a criminal's daughter into his family."

"No; it is even a harder case than I thought it," said the earl. "The only thing I can recommend is resignation."

Lord Mountdean thought that he would like to see the hapless young wife, and learn if she suffered as her husband did. He wondered too what she could be like, this convict's daughter who had been gifted with a regal dower of grace and beauty —this lowly-born child of the people who had been fair enough to charm the fastidious Lord Arleigh.

Meanwhile Madaline was all unconscious of the strides that destiny was making in her favor. She had thought her husband's letter all that was most kind; and, though she felt that there was no real grounds for it, she impressed upon her mother the need of the utmost reticence. Margaret Dornham understood from the first.

"Never have a moment's uneasiness, Madaline," she said. "From the hour I cross your threshold until I leave, your father's name shall never pass my lips."

It was a little less dreary for Madaline when her mother was with her. Though they did not talk much, and had but few tastes alike, Margaret was all devotion, all attention to her child.

She was sadly at a loss to understand matters. She had quite expected to find Madaline living at Beechgrove—she could not imagine why she was alone in Winiston House. The arrangement had seemed reasonable enough while Lord Arleigh was abroad, but now that he had returned to England, why did he not come to his wife, or why did not she go to him? She could not understand it; and as Madaline volunteered no explanation, her mother asked for none.

But, when day after day she saw her daughter fading away—when she saw the fair face lose its color, the eyes their light—when she saw the girl shrink from the sunshine and the flowers, from all that was bright and beautiful, from all that was cheerful and exhilarating—she knew that her soul was sick unto death. She would look with longing eyes at the calm, resigned

face, wishing with all her heart that she might speak, yet not daring to do so.

What seemed to her even more surprisng was that no one appeared to think such a state of things strange; and when she had been at Winiston some few weeks, she discovered that, as far as the occupants of the house were concerned, the condition of matters was not viewed as extraordinary. She offered no remark to the servants, and they offered none to her, but from casual observations she gathered that her daughter had never been to Beechgrove, but had lived at Winiston all her married life, and that Lord Arleigh had never been to visit her.

How was this? What did the terrible pain in her daughter's face mean? Why was her bright young life so slowly but surely fading away? She noted it for some time in silence, and then she decided to speak.

One morning when Madaline had turned with a sigh from the old-fashioned garden with its wilderness of flowers, Margaret said, gently:

"Madaline, I never hear you speak of the Duchess of Hazlewood, who was so very kind to you. Does she never come to see you?"

She saw the vivid crimson mount to the white brow, to be speedily replaced by a pallor terrible to behold.

"My darling," she cried, in distress, "I did not expect to grieve you!"

"Why should I be grieved?" said the girl, quietly. "The duchess does not come to see me because she acted to me very cruelly; and I never write to her now."

Then Margaret for awhile was silent. How was she to bring forward the subject nearest to her heart? She cast about for words in which to express her thoughts.

"Madaline," she said, at last, "no one has a greater respect than I have for the honor of husband and wife; I mean for the good faith and confidence there should be between them. In days gone by I never spoke of your poor father's faults—I never allowed any one to mention them to me. If any of the neighbors ever tried to talk about him, I would not allow it. So, my darling, do not consider that there is any idle curiosity in what I am about to say to you. I thought you were so happily married, my dear; and it is a bitter disappointment to me to find that such is not the case."

There came no reply from Lady Arleigh; her hands were held before her eyes.

"I am almost afraid, dearly as I love you, to ask you the question," Margaret continued; "but, Madaline, will you tell me why you do not live with your husband?"

"I cannot, mother," was the brief reply.

"Is it—oh, tell me, dear!—is it any fault of yours? Have you displeased him?"

"It is through no fault of mine, mother. He says so himself."

"Is it from any fault of his? Has he done anything to displease you?"

"No," she answered, with sudden warmth, "he has not—indeed, he could not, I love him so."

"Then, if you have not displeased each other, and really love each other, why are you parted in this strange fashion? It seems to me, Madaline, that you are his wife only in name."

"You are right, mother—and I shall never be any more; but do not ask me why—I can never tell you. The secret must live and die with me."

"Then I shall never know it, Madaline?"

"Never, mother," she answered.

"But do you know, my darling, that it is wearing your life away?"

"Yes, I know it, but I cannot alter matters. And, mother," she continued, "if we are to be good friends and live together, you must never mention this to me again."

"I will remember," said Margaret, kissing the thin white hands, but to herself she said matters should not so continue. Were Lord Arleigh twenty times a lord, he should not break his wife's heart in that cold, cruel fashion.

A sudden resolve came to Mrs. Dornham—she would go to Beechgrove and see him herself. It he were angry and sent her away from Winiston House, it would not matter—she would have told him the truth. And the truth that she had to tell him was that the separation was slowly but surely killing his wife.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Margaret Dornham knew no peace until she had carried out her intention. It was but right, she said to herself, that Lord Arleigh should know that his fair young wife was dying.

"What right had he to marry her?" she asked herself indignantly, "if he meant to break her heart?"

What could he have left her for? It could not have been because of her poverty or her father's crime—he knew of both beforehand. What was it? In vain did she recall all that Madaline had ever said about her husband—she could see no light in the darkness, find no solution to the mystery; therefore the only course open to her was to go to Lord Arleigh, and to tell him that his wife was dying.

"There may possibly have been some slight misunderstanding between them which one little interview might remove," she thought.

One day she invented some excuse for her absence from Winiston House, and started on her expedition, strong with the love that makes the weakest heart brave. She drove the greater part of the distance, and then dismissed the carriage, resolving to walk the remainder of the way—she did not wish the servants to know whither she was going. It was a delightful morning, warm, brilliant, sunny. The hedge-rows were full of wild roses, there was a faint odor of newly-mown hay, the westerly wind was soft and sweet.

As Margaret Dornham walked through the woods, she fell deeply into thought. Almost for the first time a great doubt had seized her, a doubt that made her tremble and fear. Through many long years she had clung to Madaline—she had thought her love and tender care of more consequence to the child than anything else. Knowing nothing of her father's rank or position, she had flattered herself into believing that she had been Madaline's best friend in childhood. Now there came to her a terrible doubt. What if she had stood in Madaline's light, instead of being her friend? She had not been informed of the arrangements between the doctor and his patron, but people had said to her, when the doctor died, that the child had better be sent to the work-house—and that had frightened her. Now she wondered whether she had done right or wrong. What if she, who of all the world had been the one to love Madaline best, had been her greatest foe?

Thinking of this, she walked along the soft greensward. She thought of the old life in the pretty cottage at Ashwood, where for so short a time she had been happy with her handsome, ne'er-do-well husband, whom at first she had loved so blindly; she thought of the lovely, golden-haired child which she had loved so wildly, and of the kind, clever doctor, who had been so suddenly called to his account; and then her thoughts wandered to the stranger who had intrusted his child to her care. Had she done wrong in leaving him all these years in such utter ignorance of his child's welfare? Had she wronged him? Ought she to have waited patiently until he had returned or sent? If she were ever to meet him again, would he overwhelm her with reproaches? She thought of his tall, erect figure, of his handsome face, so sorrowful and sad, of his mournful eyes, which always looked as though his heart lay buried with his dead wife.

Suddenly her face grew deathly pale, her lips flew apart with a terrified cry, her whole frame trembled. She raised her hands as one who would fain ward off a blow, for, standing just before

her, looking down on her with stern, indignant eyes, was the stranger who had intrusted his child to her.

For some minutes—how many she never knew—they stood looking at each other—he stern, indignant, haughty, she trembling, frightened, cowed.

"I recognize you again," he said, at length, in a harsh voice.

Cowed, subdued, she fell on her knees at his feet.

"Woman," he cried, "where is my child?"

She made him no answer, but covered her face with her hands.

"Where is my child?" he repeated. "I intrusted her to you—where is she?"

The white lips opened, and some feeble answer came which he could not hear.

"Where is my child?" he demanded. "What have you done with her? For Heaven's sake, answer me!" he implored.

Again she murmured something he could not catch, and he bent over her. If ever in his life Lord Mountdean lost his temper, he lost it then. He could almost, in his impatience, have forgotten that it was a woman who was kneeling at his feet, and could have shaken her until she spoke intelligibly. His anger was so great he could have struck her. But he controlled himself.

"I am not the most patient of men, Margaret Dornham," he said; "and you are trying me terribly. In the name of Heaven, I ask you, what have you done with my child?"

"I have not injured her," she sobbed.

"Is she living or dead?" asked the earl, with terrible calmness.

"She is living," replied the weeping woman.

Lord Mountdean raised his face reverently to the summer sky.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, devoutly; and then added, turning to the woman—"Living and well?"

"No, not well; but she will be in time. Oh, sir, forgive me! I did wrong, perhaps, but I thought I was acting for the best."

"It was a strange 'best,'" he said, "to place a child beyond its parent's reach."

"Oh, sir," cried Margaret Dornham, "I never thought of that! She came to me in my dead child's place—it was to me as though my own child had come back again. You could not tell how I loved her. Her little head lay on my breast, her little fingers caressed me, her little voice murmured sweet words to me. She was my own child—I loved her so, sir!" and the poor woman's voice was broken with sobs. "All the world was hard and cruel and cold to me—the child never was; all the world disappointed me—the child never did. My heart and

soul clung to her. And then, sir, when she was able to run about, a pretty, graceful, loving child, the very joy of my heart and sunshine of my life, the doctor died, and I was left alone with her."

She paused for some few minutes, her whole frame shaken with sobs. The earl, bending down, spoke kindly to her.

"I am quite sure," he said, "that if you erred it has been through love for my child. Tell me all—have no fear."

"I was in the house, sir," she continued, "when the poor doctor was carried home dead—in his sitting-room with my—with little Madaline—and when I saw the confusion that followed upon his death, I thought of the papers in the oaken box; and, without saying a word to any one, I took it and hid it under my shawl."

"But, tell me," said the earl, kindly, "why did you do that?"

"I can hardly remember now," she replied—"it is so long since. I think my chief motive was dread lest my darling should be taken from me. I thought that, if strangers opened the box and found out who she was, they would take her away from me, and I should never see her again. I knew that the box held all the papers relating to her, so I took it deliberately."

"Then, of course," said the earl, "you know her history?"

"No," she replied, quickly; "I have never opened the box."

"Never opened it!" he exclaimed, wonderingly.

"No, sir—I have never even touched it; it is wrapped in my old shawl just as I brought it away."

"But why have you never opened it?" he asked, still wondering.

"Because, sir, I did not wish to know who the little child really was, lest, in discovering that, I should discover something also which would compel me to give her up."

Lord Mountdean looked at her in astonishment. How woman-like she was! How full of contradictions! What strength and weakness, what honor and dishonor, what love and selfishness did not her conduct reveal!

"Then," continued Margaret Dornham, "when the doctor died, people frightened me. They said that the child must go to the work-house. My husband soon afterward got into dreadful trouble, and I determined to leave the village. I tell the truth, sir. I was afraid, too, that you would return and claim the child; so I took her away with me to London. My husband was quite indifferent—I could do as I liked, he said. I took her and left no trace behind. After we reached London, my husband got into trouble again; but I always did my best for

the darling child. She was well dressed, well fed, well cared for, well educated—she has had the training of a lady."

"But," put in Lord Mountdean, "did you never read my advertisments?"

"No, sir," she replied; "I have not been in the habit of reading newspapers."

"It was strange that you should remain hidden in London while people were looking for you," he said. "What was your husband's trouble, Mrs. Dornham?"

"He committed a burglary, sir; and, as he had been convicted before, his sentence was a heavy one."

"And my daughter, you say, is living, but not well? Where is she?"

"I will take you to her, sir," was the reply—"at once, if you will go."

"I will not lose a minute," said the earl, hastily. "It is time, Mrs. Dornham, that you knew my name, and my daughter's also. I am the Earl of Mountdean, and she is Lady Madaline Charlewood."

On hearing this, Margaret Dornham was more frightened than ever. She rose from her knees and stood before him.

"If I have done wrong, my lord," she said, "I beg of you to pardon me—it was all, as I thought, for the best. So the child whom I have loved and cherished was a grand lady after all?"

"Do not let us lose a moment," he said. "Where is my daughter?"

"She lives not far from here; but we cannot walk—the distance is too great," replied Margaret.

"Well, we are near to the town of Lynton—it is not twenty minutes walk; we will go to an hotel, and get a carriage. I—I can hardly endure this suspense."

He never thought to ask her how she had come thither; it never occurred to him. His whole soul was wrapped in the one idea—that he was to see his child again—Madaline's child—the little babe he had held in his arms, whose little face he had bedewed with tears—his own child—the daughter he had lost for long years and had tried so hard to find. He never noticed the summer woods through which he was passing; he never heard the wild birds' song; of sunshine or shade he took no note. The heart within him was on fire, for he was going to see his only child—his lost child—the daughter whose voice he had never heard.

"Tell me," he said, stopping abruptly, and looking at Margaret, "you saw my poor wife when she lay dead—is my child like her?"

Margaret answered quickly.

"She is like her; but, to my mind, she is a thousand times fairer."

They reached the principal hotel at Lynton, and Lord Mountdean called hastily for a carriage. Not a moment was to be lost—time pressed.

"You know the way," he said to Margaret, "will you direct the driver?"

He did not think to ask where his daughter lived, if she was married or single, what she was doing or anything else; his one thought was that he had found her—found her, never to lose her again.

He sat with his face shaded by his hand during the whole of the drive, thanking Heaven that he had found Madaline's child. He never noticed the woods, the high-road bordered with trees, the carriage-drive with its avenue of chestnuts; he did not even recognize the picturesque, quaint old Dower House that he had admired so greatly some little time before. He saw a large mansion, but it never occurred to him to ask whether his daughter was mistress or servant; he only knew that the carriage had stopped, and that very shortly he should see his child.

Presently he found himself in a large hall gay with flowers and covered with Indian matting, and Margaret Dornham was trembling before him.

"My lord," she said, "your daughter is ill, and I am afraid the agitation may prove too much for her. Tell me, what shall I do?"

He collected his scattered thoughts.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, "that she has been kept in complete ignorance of her history all these years?"

"She has been brought up in the belief that she is my daughter," said Margaret—"she knows nothing else."

A dark frown came over the earl's face.

"It was wickedly unjust," he said—"cruelly unjust. Let me go to her at once,"

Pale, trembling, and frightened, Margaret led the way. It seemed to the earl that his heart had stopped beating, and a thick mist was spread before his eyes, that the surging of a deep sea filled his ears. Oh, Heaven, could it be that after all these years he was really going to see Madaline's child, his own lost daughter? Very soon he found himself looking on a fair face framed in golden hair, with dark blue eyes, full of passion, poetry, and sorrow, sweet crimson lips, sensitive, and delicate, a face so lovely that its pure, saint-like expression almost frightened him. He looked at it in a passion of wonder and grief, of love and longing; and then he saw a shadow of fear gradually darken the beautiful eyes.

"Madaline," he said gently; and she looked at him in wonder. "Madaline," he repeated.

"I—I—do not know you," she replied, surprised.

She was lying, when he entered the room, on a little couch drawn close to the window, the sunlight, which fell full upon her, lighting up the golden hair and refined face with unearthly beauty. When he uttered her name, she stood up, and so like her mother did she appear that it was with difficulty he could refrain from clasping her in his arms. But he must not startle her, he reflected—he saw how fragile she was.

"You call me Madaline," she said again—"but I do not know you."

Before answering her, Lord Mountdean turned to Margaret.

"Will you leave us alone?" he requested, but Lady Arleigh stretched out her hand.

"That is my mother," she said—"she must not be sent away from me."

"I will not be long away, Madaline. You must listen to what this gentleman says—and, my dear, do not let it upset you."

Mrs. Dornham retired, closing the door carefully behind her, and Lady Arleigh and the earl stood looking at each other.

"You call me Madaline," she said, "and you send my mother from me. What can you have to say?" A sudden thought occurred to her. "Has Lord Arleigh sent you to me?" she asked.

"Lord Arleigh!" he repeated, in wonder. "No, he has nothing to do with what I have to say. Sit down—you do not look strong—and I will tell you why I am here."

It never occurred to him to ask why she had named Lord Arleigh. He saw her sink, half exhausted, half frightened, upon the couch, and he sat down by her side.

"Madaline," he began, "will you look at me, and see if my face brings back no dream, no memory to you? Yet how foolish I am to think of such a thing! How can you remember me when your baby-eyes rested on me for only a few minutes?"

"I do not remember you," she said, gently—"I have never seen you before."

"My poor child," he returned, in a tone so full of tenderness and pain that she was startled by it, "this is hard!"

"You cannot be the gentleman I used to see sometimes in the early home that I only just remember, who used to amuse me by showing me his watch and take me out for drives?"

"No, I never saw you, Madaline, as a child—I left you when

you were three or four days old. I have never seen you since, although I have spent a fortune almost in searching for you."

"You have?" she said, wonderingly. "Who then are you?"

"That is what I want to tell you without startling you, Madaline—dear Heaven, how strange it seems to utter that name again! You have always believed that good woman who has just quitted the room to be your mother?"

"Yes, always," she repeated, wonderingly.

"And that wretched man, the convict, you have always believed to be your father?"

"Always," she repeated.

"Will it pain or startle you very much to hear that they are not even distantly related to you—that the woman was simply chosen as your foster-mother because she had just lost her own child?"

"I cannot believe it," she cried, trembling violently. "Who are you who tells me this?"

"I am Hubert, Earl of Mountdean," he replied, "and, if you will allow me, I will tell you what else I am."

"Tell me," she said, gently.

"I am your father, Madaline—and the best part of my life has been spent in looking for you."

"My father," she said, faintly. "Then I am not the daughter of a convict—my father is an earl?"

"I am your father," he repeated, "and you, child, have your mother's face."

"And she—who has just left us—is nothing to me?"

"Nothing. Do not tremble, my dear child. Listen—try to be brave. Let me hold your hands in mine while I tell you a true story."

He held her trembling hands while he told her the story of his life, of his marriage, of the sudden and fatal journey, and her mother's death—told it in brief, clear words that left no shadow of doubt on her mind as to its perfect truth.

"Of your nurse's conduct," he said, "I forbear to speak—it was cruel, wicked; but, as love for you dictated it, I will say no more. My dear child, you must try to forget this unhappy past, and let me atone to you for it. I cannot endure to think that my daughter and heiress, Lady Madaline Charlewood, should have spent her youth under so terrible a cloud."

There came no answer, and, looking at her, he saw that the color had left her face, that the white eyelids had fallen over the blue eyes, that the white lips were parted and cold—she had fainted, fallen into a dead swoon.

He knelt by her side and called to her with passionate cries, he kissed the white face and tried to recall the wandering

senses, and then he rang the bell with a heavy peal. Mrs. Dornham came hurrying in.

"Look!" said Lord Mountdean. "I have been as careful as I could, but that is your work."

Margaret Dornham knelt by the side of the senseless girl.

"I would give my life to undo my past folly," she said. "Oh, my lord, can you ever forgive me?"

He saw the passionate love that she had for her foster-child; he saw that it was a mother's love, tender, true, devoted and self-sacrificing, though mistaken. He could not be angry, for he saw that her sorrow even exceeded his own.

To his infinite joy, Madaline presently opened her dark eyes and looked up at him. She stretched out her hands to him.

"My father," she said—"you are really my father?"

He kissed her face.

"Madaline," he replied, "my heart is too full for words. I have spent seventeen years in looking for you, and have found you at last. My dear child, we have seventeen years of love and happiness to make up."

"It seems like an exquisite dream," she said. "Can it be true?"

He saw her lovely face grow crimson, and bending her fair, shapely head, she whispered:

"Papa, does Lord Arleigh know?"

"Lord Arleigh!" he repeated. "My dear child, this is the second time you have mentioned him. What has he to do with you?"

She looked up at him in wonder.

"Do you not know?" she asked. "Have they not told you I am Lord Arleigh's wife?"

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Lord Arleigh felt very disconsolate that June morning. The world was so beautiful, so bright, so fair, it seemed hard that he should have no pleasure in it. If fate had but been kinder to him! To increase his dullness, Lord Mountdean, who had been staying with him some days, had suddenly disappeared. He had gone out early in the morning, saying that he would have a long ramble in the woods, and would probably not return until noon for luncheon. Noon had come and passed, luncheon was served, yet there was no sign of the earl. Lord Arleigh was not uneasy, but he longed for his friend's society.

At last he decided upon going in search of him. He had perhaps lost his way in the woods, or he had mistaken some road. It was high time that they looked after him—he had been so many hours absent without apparent cause. Lord Arleigh

whistled for his two favorite dogs, Nero and Venus, and started out in search of his friend.

He went through the woods and down the high-road, but there was no sign of the earl. "He must have walked home by another route," thought Lord Arleigh; and he went back to Beechgrove. He did not find the earl there, but the groom, who had evidently been riding fast, was waiting for him in the hall.

"My lord," he said, "I was directed to give you this at once, and beg of you not to lose a moment's time."

Wondering what had happened, Lord Arleigh opened the note and read:

"My dear Lord Arleigh: Something too wonderful for me to set down in words has happened. I am at the Dower House, Winiston. Come at once, and lose no time. Mountdean."

"At the Dower House?" mused Lord Arleigh. "What can it mean?"

"Did the Earl of Mountdean send this himself?" he said to the man.

"Yes, my lord. He bade me ride as though for life, and ask your lordship to hurry in the same way."

"Is he hurt? Has there been any accident?"

"I have heard of no accident, my lord; but, when the earl came to give me the note, he looked wild and unsettled."

Lord Arleigh gave orders that his fleetest horse should be saddled at once, and then he rode away.

He was so absorbed in thought that more than once he had a narrow escape, almost striking his head against the overhanging boughs of the trees. What could it possibly mean? Lord Mountdean at the Dower House! He fancied some accident must have happened to him.

He had never been to the Dower House since the night when he took his young wife thither, and as he rode along his thoughts recurred to that terrible evening. Would he see her now, he wondered, and would she, in her shy, pretty way, advance to meet him? It could not surely be that she was ill, and that the earl, having heard of it, had sent for him. No, that could not be—for the note said that something wonderful had occurred.

Speculation was evidently useless—the only thing to be done was to hasten as quickly as he could, and learn for himself what it all meant. He rode perhaps faster than he had ever ridden in his life before. When he reached the Dower House the horse was bathed in foam. He thought to himself, as he rang the bell at the outer gate, how strange it was that he—the husband—should be standing there ringing for admittance.

A servant opened the gate, and Lord Arleigh asked if the Earl of Mountdean was within, and was told that he was.

"There is nothing the matter, I hope," said Lord Arleigh—"nothing wrong?"

The servant replied that something strange had happened, but he could not tell what it was. He did not think there was anything seriously wrong. And then Lord Arleigh entered the house where the years of his young wife's life had drifted away so sadly.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Lord Arleigh was shown into the dining-room at Winiston House, and stood there impatiently awaiting the Earl of Mountdean. He came in at last, but the master of Beechgrove barely recognized him, he was so completely changed. Years seemed to have fallen from him. His face was radiant with a great glad light. He held out his hand to his friend.

"Congratulate me," he said; "I am one of the happiest men in the world."

"What has happened?" asked Lord Arleigh, in surprise.

"Follow me," said the earl; and in silence Lord Arleigh obeyed him.

They came to the pretty shaded room, and the earl, entering first, said:

"Now, my darling, the hour has come which will repay you for the sorrow of years."

Wondering at such words, Lord Arleigh followed his friend. There lay his beautiful wife, lovelier than ever, with the sunlight touching her hair with gold, her fair face transparent as the inner leaf of a rose—Madaline, his darling, who had been his wife in name only.

What did it mean? Why had the earl led him thither? Was it wanton cruelty or kindness? His first impulse was to fall on his knees by the little couch and kiss his wife's hands, his second to ask why he had been led thither to be tortured so. Madaline rose with a glad cry at his entrance, but Lord Mountdean laid a restraining hand on her shoulder.

"Lord Arleigh," said the earl, "tell me who this is."

"My wife, Lady Arleigh," he replied.

She bent forward with clasped hands.

"Oh, listen, Norman," she said, "listen."

"You looked upon her as the only woman you ever could love; you made her your wife; yet, believing her to be the daughter of a felon, you separated from her, preferring a life-time of misery to the dishonor of your name. Is it not so, Lord Arleigh?"

"Yes," he replied, "it is indeed so."

"Then now learn the truth. This lady, your wife, is not the daughter of a convict. In her—how happy the telling of it makes me—behold my daughter, the child whom for seventeen years I have sought incessantly—my heiress, Lady Madaline Charlewood, the descendant of a race as honored, as ancient, and as noble as your own!"

Lord Arleigh listened like one in a dream. It could not be possible, it could not be true, his senses must be playing him false—he must be going mad. His wife—his deserted wife—the earl's long-lost daughter! It was surely a cruel fable.

His dark, handsome face grew pale, his hands trembled, his lips quivered like a woman's. He was about to speak, when Madaline sprang forward and clasped her arms around his neck.

"Oh, my darling," she cried, "it is true—quite true! You need not be afraid to kiss me and to love me now—you need not be afraid to call me your wife—you need not be ashamed of me any longer. Oh, my darling, believe me, I am not a thief's daughter. My father is here—an honorable man, you see, not a convict. Norman, you may love me now; you need not be ashamed of me. Oh, my love, my love, I was dying, but this will make me well!"

Her golden head drooped on to his breast, the clinging arms tightened their hold of him. The earl advanced to them.

"It is all true, Arleigh," he said. "You look bewildered, but you need not hesitate to believe it. Later on I will tell you the story myself, and we will satisfy all doubts. Now be kind to her; she has suffered enough. Remember, I do not blame you, nor does she. Believing what you did, you acted for the best. We can only thank Heaven that the mystery is solved; and you can take a fair and noble maiden, who will bring honor to your race, to your home."

"My love," said Madaline, "it seems to me a happy dream."

When Lord Arleigh looked around again the earl had vanished, and he was alone with his fair young wife.

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Half an hour afterward Lord Arleigh and his wife stood together under the great cedar on the lawn. They had left the pretty drawing-room, with its cool shade and rich fragrance, and Lord Arleigh stood holding his wife's hand in his.

"You can really forgive me, Madaline?" he said. "You owe me no ill-will for all that I have made you suffer?"

She smiled as she looked at him.

"No," she replied. "How could there be ill-will between

you and me? You did right—in your place I should have acted as you did."

He caressed the fair, sweet face.

"Thank you, my darling," he said. "How thin you are!" he added. "How you have worn yourself away with fretting! What must I do to bring the roses back to this sweet face, and the light that I remember so well to the dear eyes?"

She looked up at him, her whole soul in her eyes.

"You have but one thing to do, and that is—love me," she said; "and then I shall be the happiest wife in all the world. If a choice were offered me of all the good gifts of this world, mine would be my husband's love."

Lord Arleigh looked thoughtfully at her. The sunshine glistened through the green boughs, and touched her graceful golden head as with an aureole of glory.

"I am beginning to think," he said, "that all that happens is for the best. We shall be wiser and better all our lives for having suffered."

"I think so too," observed Madaline.

"And my darling," he said, "I am quite sure of another thing. There are many good gifts in the world—wealth, fame, rank, glory—but the best gift of all is that which comes straight from Heaven—the love of a pure, good wife."

Looking up, they saw the earl crossing the lawn to meet them.

"Madaline," he said, gently, when he was close to them, "how rejoiced I am to see that look on your face. You have no thought of dying now?"

"Not if I can help it, papa," she replied.

"I think," continued the earl, "that this is the happiest day of my life. I must say this to you, Norman—that, if I had chosen from all the world, I could not have chosen a son whom I should care for more than for you, and that, if I had a son of my own, I should have wished him to be like you. And now we will talk about our future—I am so proud to have two children to arrange for instead of one—our future, that is to have no clouds. In the first place, what must we do with this good foster-mother of yours, Madaline, whose great love for you has led to all this complication?"

"I know what I should like to do," said Lady Arleigh, gently.

"Then consider it done," put in her husband.

"I should like her to live with me always," said Lady Arleigh—"in any capacity—as housekeeper, or whatever she would like. She has had so little happiness in her life, and she would find her happiness now in mine. When her unfortunate husband is free again, she can do as she likes—either go abroad

with him, or we can find them a cottage and keep them near us."

So it was arranged; and there were few happier women than Margaret Dornham when she heard the news.

"I thought," she sobbed, in a broken voice, "that I should never be forgiven; and now I find that I am to be always near to the child for whose love I would have sacrificed the world."

Lord Mountdean insisted on the fullest publicity being given to Madaline's abduction.

"There is one thing," he said, "I cannot understand—and that is how you came to misunderstand each other. Why did Madaline believe that you knew all about her story when you knew nothing of it? That secret, I suppose, you will keep to yourselves?"

"Yes," replied Lord Arleigh. "The truth is, we were both cruelly deceived—it matters little by whom and how."

"That part of the story, then, will never be understood," said Lord Mountdean. "The rest must be made public, no matter at what cost to our feelings—there must be no privacy, no shadow over my daughter's name. You give me your full consent, Norman?"

"Certainly; I think your proposal is very wise," Lord Arleigh replied.

"Another thing, Norman—I do not wish my daughter to go home to Beechgrove until her story has been made known. Then I will see that all honor is paid to her."

So it was agreed, and great was the sensation that ensued. "The Arleigh Romance," as it was called, was carried from one end of the kingdom to the other. Every newspaper was filled with it; all other intelligence sank into insignificance when compared with it. Even the leading journals of the day curtailed their political articles to give a full account of the Arleigh romance. But it was noticeable that in no way whatsoever was the name of the Duchess of Hazlewood introduced.

The story was fairly told. It recalled to the minds of the public that some time previously Lord Arleigh had made what appeared a strange marriage, and that he had separated from his wife on their wedding-day, yet paying her such honor and respect that no one could possibly think any the worse of her for it. It reminded the world how puzzled it had been at the time; and now it gave a solution of the mystery. Through no act of deception on the part of his wife, Lord Arleigh had believed that he knew her full history; but on their wedding-day he found that she was, to all appearance, the daughter of a man who was a convict. Therefore—continued the story—the young couple had agreed to separate. Lord Arleigh, although loving his wife most dearly, felt himself compelled to part from her.

He preferred that his ancient and noble race should become extinct rather than that it should be tarnished by an alliance with the offspring of crime. Lady Arleigh agreed with her husband, and took up her abode at the Dower House, surrounded by every mark of esteem and honor. Then the story reverted to the Earl of Mountdean's lost child, and how, at length, to the intense delight of the husband and father, it was discovered that Lady Arleigh was no other than the long-lost daughter of Lord Mountdean.

As the earl had said, the only obscure point in the narrative was how Lord Arleigh had been deceived. Evidently it was not his wife who had deceived him—who, therefore, could it have been? That the world was never to know.

It was extraordinary how the story spread, and how great was the interest it excited. There was not a man or woman in all England who did not know it.

When the earl deemed that full reparation had been made to his daughter, he agreed that she should go to Beechgrove.

The country will never forget that home-coming. It was on a brilliant day toward the end of July. The whole country side was present to bid Lady Arleigh welcome—the tenants, servants, dependents, friends; children strewed flowers in her path, flags and banners waved in the sunlit air, there was a long procession with bands of music, there were evergreen arches with "Welcome Home" in monster letters.

It was difficult to tell who was cheered most heartily—the fair young wife whose beauty won all hearts, the noble husband, or the gallant earl whose pride and delight in his daughter were so great. Lord Arleigh said a few words in response to this splendid reception—and he was not ashamed of his own inability to finish what he had intended to say.

There had never been such a home-coming within one's memory. The old house was filled with guests, all the *élite* of the county were there. There was a grand dinner, followed by a grand ball, and there was feasting for the tenantry—everything that could be thought of for the amusement of the vast crowd.

On that evening, while the festivities were at their height, Lord Arleigh and his lovely young wife stole away from their guests and went up to the picture-gallery. The broad, silvery moonbeams fell on the spot where they had once endured such cruel anguish. The fire seemed to have paled in the rubies round the white neck of Titian's gorgeous beauty. Lord Arleigh clasped his wife in his arms, and then he placed her at some little distance from himself, where the silvery moonlight fell on the fair, lovely profile, on the golden head, on the superb dress of rich white silk and on the gleaming diamonds.

"My darling," he said, "you are a thousand times lovelier

than even Titian's beauty here! Do you remember all we suffered in this spot?'

"I can never forget it," she replied.

"But you must forget it—it is for that I have brought you hither. This is the pleasantest nook in our house, and I want you to have pleasant associations with it. Where we suffered hear me say———" He paused.

"What is it?" she asked, quietly.

He threw his arms round her, and drew her to his breast.

"Hear me say this, my darling—that I love you with all my heart; that I will so love you, truthfully and faithfully, until death; and that I thank Heaven for the sweetest and best of all blessings, the gift of a good, pure, and loving wife."

CHAPTER XL.

Philippa, Duchess of Hazlewood, was sitting in the superb drawing-room at Vere Court. It was some time since she had left town, but she had brought some portion of the gay world back with her. The court was filled with visitors, and nothing was thought of but brilliant festivities and amusement. The duchess was queen of all gayety; the time that had passed had simply added to her beauty—she was now one of the handsomest women in society.

It was a warm day, the last day in June, and Vere Court had never seemed so brilliant. The lovely young duchess had withdrawn for a short time from her guests. Most of them had gone out riding or driving. There was to be a grand ball that evening, and her Grace of Hazlewood did not wish to fatigue herself before it came off. As for driving or riding in the hot sun simply because the day was fine and the country fair, she did not believe in it. She had retired to her drawing-room; a soft couch had been placed near one of the open windows, and the breeze that came in was heavy with perfume. On the stand by her side lay a richly-jeweled fan, a bottle of sweet scent, a bouquet of heliotrope—her favorite flower—and one or two books which she had selected to read. She lay, with her dark, queenly head on the soft cushion of crimson velvet in an attitude that would have charmed a painter. But the duchess was not wasting the light of her dark eyes over a book. She had closed them, as a flower closes its leaves in the heat of the sun. As she lay there, beautiful, languid, graceful, the picture she formed was a marvelously rich study of color. So thought the duke, who, unheard by her, had entered the room.

Everything had prospered with his grace. He had always been extremely wealthy, but his wealth had been increased in a sudden and unexpected fashion. On one of his estates in the north a vein of coal had been discovered, which was one of the richest in England. The proceeds of it added wonderfully to his income, and promised to add still more. No luxury was wanting; the duchess had all that her heart, even in its wildest caprices, could desire. The duke loved her with as keen and passionate a love as ever. He had refused to go out this morning, because she had not gone; and now he stood watching her with something like adoration in his face—the beautiful woman, in her flowing draperies of amber and white. He went up to her and touched her brow lightly with his lips.

"Are you asleep, my darling?" he asked.

"No," she replied, opening her eyes.

"I have something to read to you—something wonderful."

She roused herself.

"Your geese are generally swans, Vere. What is the wonder?"

"Listen, Philippa;" and, as the duke scanned the newspaper in his hands, he sang the first few lines of his favorite song:

"'Queen Philippa sat in her bower alone.'

"Ah, here it is!" he broke off. "I am sure you will say that this is wonderful. It explains all that I could not understand—and, for Arleigh's sake, I am glad, though what you will say to it, I cannot think."

And, sitting down by her side, he read to her the newspaper account of the Arleigh romance.

He read it without interruption, and the queenly woman listening to him knew that her revenge had failed, and that, instead of punishing the man who had slighted her love, she had given him one of the sweetest, noblest and wealthiest girls in England. She knew that her vengeance had failed—that she had simply crowned Lord Arleigh's life with the love of a devoted wife.

When the duke looked up from his paper to see what was the effect of his news, he saw that the duchess had quietly fainted away, and lay with the pallor of death on her face. He believed that the heat was the cause, and never suspected his wife's share in the story.

She recovered after a few minutes. She did not know whether she was more glad or sorry at what she had heard. She had said once before of herself that she was not strong enough to be thoroughly wicked—and she was right.

* * * * * * * *

A year had elapsed, and Lord Arleigh and his wife were in

town for the season, and were, as a matter of course, the objects of much curiosity. He was sitting one evening in the drawing-room of his town-house, when one of the servants told him that a lady wished to see him. He inquired her name and was told that she declined to give it. He ordered her to be shown into the room where he was, and presently there entered a tall stately lady, whose face was closely vailed; but the imperial figure, the stately grace were quite familiar to him.

"Philippa!" he cried, in astonishment.

Then she raised her vail, and once again he saw the grandly-beautiful face of the woman who had loved him with such passionate love.

"Philippa!" he repeated.

"Yes," said the duchess, calmly. "And do you know why I am here?"

"I cannot even guess," he replied.

"I am here to implore your pardon," she announced, with deep humility—"to tell you that neither by night nor by day, since I planned and carried out my revenge, have I known peace. I shall neither live nor die in peace unless you forgive me, Norman."

She bent her beautiful, haughty head before him—her eyes were full of tears.

"You will forgive me, Norman?" she said in her low, rich voice. "Remember that it was love for you which bereft me of my reason and drove me mad—love for you. You should pardon me."

Leaving her standing there, Lord Arleigh drew aside the velvet hangings and disappeared. In a few moments he returned, leading his wife by the hand.

"Philippa," he said, gravely, "tell my wife your errand; hear what she says. We will abide by her decision."

At first the duchess drew back with a haughty gesture.

"It was you I came to see," she said to Lord Arleigh; and then the sweet face touched her and her better self prevailed.

"Madaline," she said, quietly, "you have suffered much through me—will you pardon me?"

The next moment Lady Arleigh's arms were clasped round her neck, and the pure sweet lips touched her own.

"It was because you loved him," she whispered, "and I forgive you."

* * * * * * * *

The Duke of Hazlewood did not understand the quarrel between his wife and Lord Arleigh, nor did he quite understand the reconciliation; still he is very pleased that they are recon-

ciled, for he likes Lord Arleigh better than any friend he has ever had. He fancies, too, that his beautiful wife always seems kinder to him when she has been spending some little time with Lady Arleigh.

In the gallery at Verdun Royal there is a charming picture called "The Little Lovers." The figures in it are those of a dark-haired, handsome boy of three whose hand is filled with cherries, and a lovely little girl, with hair like sunshine and a face like a rosebud, who is accepting the rich ripe fruit. Those who understand smile as they look at this painting, for the dark-haired boy is the son and heir of the Duke of Hazlewood, and the fair faced girl is Lord Arleigh's daughter.

The Earl of Mountdean and his wife, *née* Lady Lily Gordon, once went to see that picture, and, as they stood smiling before it, he said:

"It may indicate what lies in the future. Let us hope it does; for the greatest gift of Heaven is the love of a good and pure-minded wife."

THE END.

VICE VERSA.

CHAPTER I.

BLACK MONDAY.

"In England, where boys go to boarding-schools, if the holidays were not long there would be no opportunity for cultivating the domestic affections."—*Letter of Lord Campbell's*, 1835.

On a certain Monday evening late in January, 1881, Paul Bultitude, Esq. (of Mincing Lane, Colonial Produce Merchant), was sitting alone in his dining-room at Westbourne Terrace after dinner.

The room was a long and lofty one, furnished in the stern, uncompromising style of the mahogany age, now supplanted by the later fashions of decorations which, in their outset original and artistic, seem fairly on the way to become as meaningless and conventional.

Here were no skillfully contrasted shades of gray or green, no dado, no distemper on the walls; the wood-work was grained and varnished after the mannar of the Philistines, the walls papered in dark crimson, with heavy curtains of the same color, and the sideboard, dinner-wagon, and row of stiff chairs were all carved in the same massive and expensive style of ugliness. The pictures were those familiar presentments of dirty rabbits, fat white horses, bloated goddesses, and misshapen boors, by masters who, if younger than they assume to be, must have been quite old enough to know better.

Mr. Bultitude was a tall and portly person, of a somewhat pompous and overbearing demeanor; not much over fifty, but looking considerably older. He had a high shining head, from which the hair had mostly departed, what little still remained being of a grizzled auburn, prominent pale-blue eyes with heavy eyelids and fierce, bushy white-brown eyebrows. His general expression suggested a conviction of his own extreme im-

portance, but, in spite of this, his big under-lip drooped rather weakly and his double chin slightly receded, giving a judge of character reason for suspecting that a certain obstinate positiveness observable in Mr. Bultitude's manner might possibly be due, less to the possession of an unusually strong will than to the circumstances that, by some fortunate chance, that will had hitherto never met with serious opposition.

The room, with all its æsthetic shortcomings, was comfortable enough, and Mr. Bultitude's attitude—he was lying back in a well-wadded leather arm-chair, with a glass of claret at his elbow and his feet stretched out toward the ruddy blaze of the fire—seemed at first sight to imply that happy after-dinner condition of perfect satisfaction with one's self and things in general which is the natural outcome of a good cook, a good conscience, and a good digestion.

At first sight; because his face did not confirm the impression—there was a latent uneasiness in it, an air of suppressed irritation, as if he expected and even dreaded to be disturbed at any moment, and yet was powerless to resent the intrusion as he would like to do.

At the slightest sound in the hall outside he would half rise in his chair and glance at the door with a mixture of alarm and resignation, and as often as the steps died away and the door remained closed he would sink back and resettle himself with a shrug of evident relief.

Habitual novel readers on reading thus far will, I am afraid, prepare themselves for the arrival of a faithful cashier with news of irretrievable ruin, or a mysterious and cynical stranger threatening disclosures of a disgraceful nature.

But all such anticipations must at once be ruthlessly dispelled. Mr. Bultitude, although he was certainly a merchant, was a fairly successful one—in direct defiance of the law of fiction, where any connection with commerce seems to lead naturally to failure in one of the three volumes.

He was an old gentleman, too, of irreproachable character and antecedents.

No Damocles' sword of exposure was swinging over his bald but blameless head; he had no disasters to fear and no indiscretions to conceal. He had not been intended for melodrama, which, indeed, he would not have considered a respectable thing to be connected with.

In fact, the secret of his uneasiness was so absurdly simple and commonplace that I am rather ashamed to have made even a temporary mystery of it.

His son Dick was about to return to school that evening, and Mr. Bultitude was expecting every moment to be called upon to

go through a parting scene with him; that was really all that was troubling him.

This sounds very creditable to the tenderness of his feelings as a father—for there are some parents who bear such a bereavement at the close of the holidays with extraordinary fortitude, if they do not actually betray an unnatural satisfaction at the event.

But it was not exactly from softness of heart that he was restless and impatient, nor did he dread any severe strain upon his emotions. He was not much given to sentiment, and was the author of more than one of those pathetically indignant letters to the papers, in which the British parent denounces the expenses of education and the unconscionable length and frequency of vacations.

He was one of those nervous and fidgety persons who can not understand their own children, looking on them as objectionable monsters whose next movements are uncertain—much as Frankenstein must have felt toward *his* monster.

He hated to have a boy about the house, and positively writhed under the irrelevant and irrepressible questions, the unnecessary noises and boisterous high spirits, which nothing would subdue; his son's society was to him simply an abominable nuisance, and he pined and yearned for a release from it from the day the holidays began.

He had been a widower for some years, and no doubt the loss of a mother's loving tact, which can check the heedless merriment before it becomes intolerable, and interpret and soften the most peevish and unreasonable of rebukes, had done much to make the relations between parent and children more strained than they might otherwise have been.

As it was, Dick's fear of his father was just great enough to prevent any cordiality between them, and not sufficient to make him careful to avoid offense, and it is not surprising if, when the time came for him to return to his house of bondage at Dr. Grimstone's, Crichton House, Rodwell Regis, he left his father anything but inconsolable.

Just now, although Mr. Bultitude was so near the hour of his deliverance, he still had a bad quarter of an hour before him, in which the last farewells must be said, and he found it impossible under these circumstances to compose himself for a quiet half hour's nap, or to retire to the billiard-room for a cup of coffee and a mild cigar, as he would otherwise have done—since he was certain to be disturbed.

And there was another thing which harrassed him, and that was a haunting dread lest at the last moment some unforeseen accident should prevent the boy's departure after all. He had some grounds for this, for only a week before a sudden and un-

precedented snow-storm had dashed his hopes, on the eve of their fulfillment, by forcing the doctor to postpone the day on which the school was to reassemble, and now Paul sat on brambles until he had seen the house definitely rid of his son's presence.

All this time, while the father was fretting and fuming in his arm-chair, the son, the unlucky cause of all this discomfort, had been standing on the mat outside the door, trying to screw up enough courage to go in as if nothing was the matter with him.

He was not looking particularly boisterous just then. On the contrary, his face was pale, and his eyes rather redder than he would quite care for them to be seen by any of the "fellows" at Crichton House. All the life and spirit had gone out of him for the time; he had a troublesome dryness in his throat, and a general sensation of chill-heaviness, which he himself would have described—expressively enough, if not with academical elegance—as "feeling beastly."

The stoutest hearted boy, returning to the most perfect of schools, cannot always escape something of this at that dark hour when the sands of the holidays have run out to their last golden grain, when the boxes are standing corded and labeled in the passage, and some one is going to fetch the fatal cab.

Dick had just gone the round of the house, bidding dreary farewells to all the servants; an unpleasant ordeal which he would gladly have dispensed with, if possible, and which did not serve to raise his spirits.

Up-stairs, in the bright nursery, he had found his old nurse sitting sewing by the high wire fender. She was a stern, hard-featured old lady, who had systematically slapped him through infancy into boyhood, and he had had some stormy passages with her during the past few weeks; but she softened now in the most unexpected manner as she said good-by, and told him he was a "pleasant, good-hearted young gentleman, after all, though that aggravating and contrairy sometimes." And then she predicted, with some of the rashness attaching to irresponsibility, that he would be "the best boy this next term as ever was, and work hard at all his lessons, and bring home a prize"—but all this unusual gentleness only made the interview more difficult to come out of with any credit for self-control.

Then down-stairs, the cook had come up in her evening brown print and clean collar, from her warm, spice-scented kitchen to remark cheerily that "Lor' bless his heart, what with all these telegrafts and things, time flew so fast nowadays that they'd be having him back again before they all knew where they were!"

And this had a certain spurious consolation about it, until one saw that, after all, it put the case entirely from her own standpoint.

After this Dick had parted from his elder sister Barbara and his young brother Roly, and had arrived where we found him first, at the mat outside the dining-room door, where he still lingered, shivering, in the cold, foggy hall.

Somehow he could not bring himself to take the next step at once; he knew pretty well what his father's feelings would be, and a parting is a very unpleasant ceremony to one who feels that the regret is all on his own side.

But it was no use putting it off any longer; he resolved at last to go in and get it over, and opened the door accordingly. How warm and comfortable the room looked—more comfortable than it ever seemed to him before, even on the first day of the holidays!

And his father would be sitting there in a quarter of an hour's time, just as he was now, while he himself would be lumbering along to the station through the dismal, raw fog!

How unspeakably delightful it must be, thought Dick, enviously, to be grown up and never worried by the thoughts of school and lesson-books; to be able to look forward to returning to the same comfortable house, and living the same easy life, day after day, week after week, with no fear of a swiftly advancing Black Monday.

Gloomy moralists might have informed him that we cannot escape school by simply growing up, and that, even for those who contrive this and make a long holiday of their lives, there comes a time when the days are grudgingly counted to a blacker Monday than ever makes a schoolboy's heart quake within him.

But then Dick would never have believed them, and the moralists would only have wasted much excellent common sense upon him.

Paul Bultitude's face cleared as he saw his son come in. "There you are, eh!" he said, with evident satisfaction, as he turned in his chair, intending to cut the scene as short as possible. "So you're off at last? Well, holidays can't last forever—by a merciful decree of Providence, they don't last quite forever! There, good-by, good-by, be a good boy this term, no more scrapes, mind. And now you'd better run away, and put on your coat—you're keeping the cab waiting all this time."

"No, I'm not," said Dick, "Boaler hasn't gone to fetch one yet."

"Not gone to fetch a cab yet!" cried Paul, with evident alarm, "why, God bless my soul, what's the man thinking about? You'll lose your train! I know you'll lose the train, and there will be another day lost, after the extra week gone already through that snow! I must see to this myself. Ring the bell, tell Boaler to start this instant—I insist on his fetching a cab this instant!"

"Well, it's not my fault, you know," grumbled Dick, not considering so much anxiety at all flattering; "but Boaler has gone now. I just heard the gate clang."

"Ah!" said his father, with more composure, "and now," he suggested, "you'd better shake hands, and then go up and say good-by to your sister—you've no time to spare."

"I've said good-by to them," said Dick. "Mayn't I stay here till—till Boaler comes?"

This request was due less to filial affection than a faint desire for dessert, which even his feelings could not altogether stifle. Mr. Bultitude granted it with a very bad grace.

"I suppose you can if you want to," he said, impatiently; "only do one thing or the other—stay outside, or shut the door and come in, and sit down quietly. I cannot sit in a thorough draught!"

Dick obeyed, and applied himself to the dessert with rather an injured expression.

Paul felt a greater sense of constraint and worry than ever; the interview, as he had feared, seemed likely to last some time, and he felt that he ought to improve the occasion in some way, or, at all events, make some observation. But, for all that, he had not the remotest idea what to say to this red-haired, solemn boy, who sat staring gloomily at him in the intervals of filling his mouth. The situation grew more embarrassing every moment.

At last, as he felt himself likely to have more to say in reproof than on any other subject, he began with that.

"There's one thing I want to talk to you about before you go," he began, "and that's this. I had a most unsatisfactory report of you this last term; don't let me have that again. Dr. Grimstone tells me—ah, I have his letter here—yes, he says (and just attend, instead of making yourself ill with preserved ginger) —he says: 'Your son has great natural capacity, and excellent abilities; but I regret to say that, instead of applying himself as he might do, he misuses his advantages, and succeeds in setting a mischievous example to—if not actually misleading—his companions.' That's a pleasant account for a father to read! Here am I, sending you to an expensive school, furnishing you with great natural capacity and excellent abilities, and—and—every other school requisite, and all you do is to misuse them! It's disgraceful! And misleading your companions, too! Why, at your age, they ought to mislead you—No, I don't mean that—but what I may tell you is, that I've written a very strong letter to Dr. Grimstone, saying what pain it gave me to hear you misbehaved yourself; and telling him, if he ever caught you setting an example of any sort, mind that, any sort, in the future—he was to, ah, to remember some of Solomon's very sensible re-

marks on the subject. So I should strongly advise you to take care what you're about in future, for your own sake!"

This was not a very encouraging address, perhaps, but it did not seem to distress Dick to any extent; he had heard very much the same sort of thing several times before, and had been fully prepared for it then.

He had been seeking distraction in almonds and raisins, but now they only choked instead of consoling him, and he gave them up and sat brooding silently over his hard lot instead, with a dull, blank dejection which those only who have gone through the same thing in their boyhood will understand. To others, whose school life has been one uncheckered course of excitement and success, it will be incomprehensible enough—and so much the better for them.

He sat listening to the grim sphinx-clock on the black marble chimney-piece, as it remorselessly ticked away his last few moments of home life, and he ingeniously set himself to crown his sorrow by reviving recollections of happier days.

In one of the corners of the chimney-glass there was still a sprig of withered laurel left forgotten, and his eye fell on it now with a grim satisfaction. He made his thoughts travel back to that delightful afternoon on Christmas Eve, when they had all come home riotous through the brilliant streets, laden with purchases from the Baker Street Bazaar, and then had decorated the rooms with such free and careless gayety.

And the Christmas dinner, too! He had sat just where he was sitting now, with, ah! such a difference in every other respect—the time had not come then when the thought of "only so many more weeks and days left" had begun to intrude its grizzly shape, like the skull at an ancient feast.

And yet he could distinctly recollect now, and with bitter remorse, that he had not enjoyed himself then as much as he ought to have done; he even remembered an impious opinion of his that the proceedings were "slow." Slow! with plenty to eat, and three (four, if he had only known it) more weeks of holiday before him; with Boxing Day, and the brisk, exhilarating drive to the Crystal Palace immediately following, with all the rest of a season of license and varied joys to come, which he could hardly trust himself to look back upon now! He must have been mad to think such a thing.

Overhead, his sister Barbara was playing softly one of the airs from "The Pirates" (it was Frederic's appeal to the Major-General's daughters), and the music, freed from the serio-comic situation which it illustrates, had a tenderness and pathos of its own which went to Dick's heart and intensified his melancholy!

He had gone (in secret, for Mr. Bultitude disapproved of such

dissipations) to hear the opera in the holidays, and now the piano conjured the whole scene up for him again—there would be no more theater-going for him for a very long time!

By this time Mr. Bultitude began to feel the silence becoming once more oppressive, and roused himself with a yawn.

"Heigho!" he said, "Boaler's an uncommonly long time fetching that cab!"

Dick felt more injured than ever, and showed it by drawing what he intended for a moving sigh.

Unfortunately it was misunderstood.

"I do wish, sir," said Paul, testily, "you would try to break yourself of that habit of breathing hard. The society of a grampus (for it's no less) delights no one and offends many—including me—and for heaven's sake, Dick, don't kick the leg of the table in that way; you know it simply maddens me. What do you do it for? Why can't you learn to sit at table like a gentleman?"

Dick mumbled some apology, and then, having found his tongue and remembered his necessities, said, with a nervous catch of his voice:

"Oh, I say, papa, will you—can you let me have some pocket-money, please, to go back with?"

Paul looked as if his son had petitioned for a latch-key.

"Pocket-money!" he repeated, "why, you can't want money. Didn't your grandmother give you a sovereign as a Christmas-box? And I gave you ten shillings myself!"

"I do want it, though," said Dick; "that's all spent. And you know you always have given me money to take back."

"If I do give you some, you'll only go and spend it," grumbled Mr. Bultitude, as if he considered money an object of art.

"I sha'n't spend it all at once, and I shall want some to put in the plate on Sundays. We always have to put in the plate when it's a collection. And there's the cab to pay."

"Boaler has orders to pay your cab—as you know well enough," said Paul, "but I suppose you must have some, though you cost me enough, Heaven knows, without this additional expense."

And at this he brought up a fistful of loose silver and gold from one of his trouser-pockets, and spread it deliberately out on the table in front of him in shining rows.

Dick's eyes sparkled at the sight of so much wealth; for a moment or two he almost forgot the pangs of approaching exile in the thought of the dignity and credit which a single one of those bright new sovereigns would procure for him.

It would insure him surreptitious luxuries and open friendships as long as it lasted. Even Tipping, the head boy of the school, who had gone into tails, brought back no more, and

besides, the money would bring him handsomely out of certain pecuniary difficulties to which an unexpected act of parental authority had exposed him; he could easily dispose of all claims with such a sum at command, and then his father could so easily spare it out of so much!

Meanwhile Mr. Bultitude, with great care and precision, selected from the coins before him a florin, two shillings, and two sixpences, which he pushed across to his son, who looked at them with a disappointment he did not care to conceal.

"An uncommonly liberal allowance for a young fellow like you," Paul observed. "Don't buy any foolishness with it, and if, toward the end of the term, you want a little more, and write an intelligible letter asking for it, and I think proper to let you have it—why, you'll get it, you know."

Dick had not courage to ask for more, much as he longed to do so, so he put the money in his purse with very qualified expressions of gratitude.

In his purse he seemed to find something which had escaped his memory, for he took out a small parcel and unfolded it with some hesitation.

"I nearly forgot," he said, speaking with more animation than he had yet done, "I didn't like to take it without asking you, but is this any use? May I have it?"

"Eh?" said Paul, sharply, "what's that? Something else—what is it you want now?"

"It's only that stone Uncle Duke brought mamma from India; the thing, he said, they called a 'Pagoda stone,' or something, out there."

"Pagoda stone? The boy means Garudâ stone. I should like to know how you got hold of that? you've been meddling in my drawers, now, a thing I will not put up with, as I've told you over and over again."

"No, I haven't then," said Dick; "I found it in a tray in the drawing-room, and Barbara said, perhaps, if I asked you, you might let me have it, as she didn't think it was any use to you."

"Then Barbara had no right to say anything of the sort," snapped Paul.

"But may I have it? I may—mayn't I?" persisted Dick.

"Have it? certainly not. What could you possibly want with a thing like that? It's ridiculous. Give it to me."

Dick handed it over reluctantly enough. It was not much to look at, quite an insignificant-looking little square tablet of grayish-green stone, pierced at one angle, and having on two of its faces faint traces of mysterious symbols, which time had made very difficult to distinguish.

It looked harmless enough as Mr. Bultitude took it in his hand; there was no kindly hand to hold him back, no warning

voice to hint that there might possibly be sleeping within that small marble block the pent-up energy of long-forgotten Eastern necromancy, just as ready as ever to awake into action at the first words which had power to evoke it.

There was no one; but, even if there had been such a person, Paul was a sober, prosaic individual, who would probably have treated the warning as a piece of ridiculous superstition.

As it was, no man could have put himself in a position of extreme peril with a more perfect unconsciousness of his danger.

CHAPTER II.

A GRAND TRANSFORMATION SCENE.

"Magnaque numinibus vota exaudita malignis."

Mr. Bultitude put on his glasses to examine the stone more carefully, for it was some time since he had last seen or thought about it. Then he looked up, and said once more:

"What use would a thing like this be to you?"

Dick would have considered it a very valuable prize, indeed; he could have exhibited it to admiring friends—during lessons, of course, when it would prove a most agreeable distraction—he could have played with and fingered it incessantly; invented astonishing legends of its powers and virtues; and, at last, when he had grown tired of it, have bartered it for any more desirable article that might take his fancy. All these advantages were present to his mind in a vague, shifting form, but he could not find either courage or words to explain them.

Consequently he only said, awkwardly:

"Oh, I don't know; I should like it."

"Well, any way," said Paul, "you certainly won't have it. It's worth keeping, whatever it is, as the only thing your Uncle Marmaduke was ever known to give to anybody."

Marmaduke Paradine, Mr. Bultitude's brother-in-law, was not a connection of which he had much reason to feel particularly proud. One of those persons endowed with what are known as "insinuating manners and address," he had, after some futile attempts to enter the army, been sent out to Bombay as agent for a Manchester firm, and in that capacity had contrived to be mixed up in some more than shady transactions with rival ex-

porters and native dealers up the country, which led to an unceremonious dismissal by his employers.

He had brought home the stone from India as a propitiatory token of remembrance, more portable and less expensive than the lacquered cabinets, brasses, stuffs, and carved work which are expected from friends at such a distance, and he had been received with pardon and started once more, until certain other proceedings of his, shadier still, had obliged Paul to forbid him the house at Westbourne Terrace.

Since then little had been heard of him, and the reports which reached Mr. Bultitude of his disreputable relative's connection with the promotion of a series of companies of the kind affected by the widow and curate, and exposed in money articles and law courts, gave him no desire to renew his acquaintance.

"Isn't it a talisman, though?" said Dick, rather unfortunately for any hopes he might have of persuading his father to entrust him with the coveted treasure.

"I'm sure I can't tell you," yawned Paul; "how do you mean?"

"I don't know, only Uncle Duke once said something about it. Barbara heard him tell mamma. I say perhaps it's like the one in Scott, and cures people of things, though I don't think it's that sort of talisman either, because I tried it once on my chilblains, and it wasn't a bit of good. If you would only let me have it, perhaps I might find out, you know."

"You might," said his father, dryly, apparently not much influenced by this inducement, "but you won't have the chance. If it has a secret, I will find it out for myself (he little knew how literally he was to be taken at his word), and, by the way, there's your cab—at last!"

There was a sound of wheels outside, and, as Dick heard them, he grew desperate in his extremity; a wish he had long secretly cherished unspoken, without ever hoping for courage to give it words, rose to his lips now; he got up and moved timidly toward his father.

"Papa," he said, "there's something I want to say to you so much before I go. Do let me ask you now."

"Well, what is it?" said Paul. "Make haste, you haven't much time."

"It's this. I want you to—to let me leave Grimstone's at the end of the term."

Paul stared at him, angry and incredulous. "Let you leave Dr. Grimstone's (oblige me by giving him his full title when you speak of him)," he said slowly. "Why, what do you mean? It's an excellent school—never saw a better expressed prospectus in my life. And my old friend Bangle, Sir Benjamin Bangle, who's a member of the School Board, and ought to

know something about schools, strongly recommended it—would have sent his own son there, if he hadn't entered him at Eton. And when I pay for most of the extras for you, too. Dancing, by Gad, and meat for breakfast. I'm sure I don't know what you would have!"

"I'd like to go to Marlborough, or Harrow, or somewhere," whimpered Dick; "Jolland's going to Harrow at Easter. (Jolland's one of the fellows at Grimstone's—Dr. Grimstone's, I mean.) And what does old Bangle know about it? He hasn't got to go there himself! And—and Grimstone's jolly enough to fellows he likes, but he doesn't like me—he's always sitting on me for something—and I hate some of the fellows there, and altogether it's beastly. Do let me leave! If you don't want me to go to a public school, I—I could stop at home and have a private tutor—like Joe Twitterly!"

"It's all ridiculous nonsense, I tell you," said Paul, angrily, "ridiculous nonsense! And, once for all, I'll put a stop to it. I don't approve of public schools for boys like you, and, what's more, I can't afford it. As for private tutors, that's absurd! So you will just make up your mind to stay at Crichton House as long as I think proper to keep you there, and there's an end of that!"

At this final blow to all his hopes, Dick began to sob in a subdued, hopeless kind of a way, which was more than his father could bear. To do Paul justice, he had not meant to be quite so harsh when the boy was about to set out for school, and, a little ashamed of his irritation, he sought to justify his decision.

He chose to do this by delivering a short homily on the advantages of school, by which he might lead Dick to look on the matter in the calm light of reason and common sense, and commonplaces on the subject began to rise to the surface of his mind, from the rather muddy depths to which they had long since sunk.

He began to give Dick the benefit of all this stagnant wisdom, with a feeling of surprise, as he went on, at his own powerful and original way of putting things.

"Now, you know, it's no use to cry like that," he began. "It's—ah, the usual thing for boys at school, I'm quite aware, to go about fancying they're very ill-used, and miserable, and all the rest of it, just as if people in my position had their sons educated out of spite! It's one of those petty troubles all boys have to go through. And you mark my words, my boy, when they go out into the world, and have real trials to put up with, and grow old men, like me, why, they see what fools they've been, Dick; they see what fools they've been. All the—hum, the innocent games and delights of boyhood, and that sort of

thing, you know—come back to them—and then they look back to those hours passed at school as the happiest, ay, the very happiest time of their life!"

"Well," said Dick, "then I hope it won't be the happiest time in mine, that's all! And you may have been happy at the school you went to, perhaps, but I don't believe you would very much care about being a boy again like me, and going back to Grimstone's; you know you wouldn't!"

This put Paul on his mettle; he had warmed well to his subject, and could not let this open challenge pass unnoticed—it gave him such an opening for a cheap and easy effect.

He sank back into his chair, and put the tips of his fingers together, smiling with a tolerant superiority.

"Perhaps you will believe me," he said, impressively, "when I tell you, old as I am and much as you envy me, I only wish, at this very moment, I could be a boy again, like you. Going back to school wouldn't make me unhappy, I can tell you."

It is so fatally easy to say more than we mean in the desire to make as strong an impression as possible. Well for most of us that—more fortunate than Mr. Bultitude—we can generally do so without fear of being taken too strictly at our word.

As he spoke these unlucky words, he felt a slight shiver, followed by a curious shrinking sensation all over him. It was odd, too, but the arm-chair in which he sat seemed to have grown so much bigger all at once. He felt a passing surprise, but concluded it must be fancy, and went on as comfortably as before.

"I should like it, my boy, but what's the good of wishing? I only mention it to prove that I was not speaking at random. I'm an old man and you're a young boy, and, that being so, why, of course—— What the deuce are you giggling about?"

For Dick, after some seconds of half-frightened, open-mouthed staring, had suddenly burst into a violent fit of almost hysterical giggling, which he seemed trying vainly to suppress.

This naturally annoyed Mr. Bultitude, and he went on with immense dignity:

"I, ah, I'm not aware that I've been saying anything particularly ridiculous. You seem to be amused?"

"Don't!" gasped Dick. "It—it isn't anything you're saying—it's, it's—oh, can't you feel any difference?"

"The sooner you go back to school the better!" said Paul, angrily. "I wash my hands of you. When I do take the trouble to give you any advice, it's received with ridicule. You always were an ill-mannered little cub. I've had quite enough of this. Leave the room, sir!"

The wheels must have belonged to some other cab, for none

had stopped at the pavement as yet; but Mr. Bultitude was justly indignant and could stand the interview no longer. Dick, however, made no attempt to move; he remained there, choking and shaking with laughter, while his father sat stiffly on his chair, trying to ignore his son's unmannerly conduct, but only partially succeeding.

No one can calmly endure watching other people laughing at him like idiots, while he is left perfectly incapable of guessing what he has said or done to amuse them. Even when this is known, it requires a peculiarly keen sense of humor to see the point of a joke against one's self.

At last his patience gave out, and he said, coldly:

"Now, perhaps, if you are quite yourself again, you will be good enough to let me know what the joke is?"

Dick, looking flushed and half ashamed, tried again and again to speak, but each time the attempt was too much for him. After a time he did succeed, but his voice was hoarse and shaken with laughter as he spoke.

"Haven't you found it out yet? Go and look at yourself in the glass—it will make you roar!"

There was the usual narrow sheet of plate glass at the back of the sideboard, and to this Mr. Bultitude walked, almost under protest, and with a cold dignity. It occurred to him that he might have a smudge on his face or something wrong with his collar and tie—something to account to some extent for his son's frivolous and insulting behavior. No suspicion of the terrible truth crossed his mind as yet.

Meanwhile Dick was looking on eagerly with a chuckle of anticipation, as one who watches the dawning appreciation of an excellent joke.

But no sooner had Paul met the reflection in the glass than he started back in incredulous horror—then returned, and stared again and again.

Surely, surely, this could not be he!

He had expected to see his own familiar portly bow-windowed presence there—but somehow, look as he would, the mirror insisted upon reflecting the figure of his son Dick. Could he possibly have become invisible and have lost the power of casting a reflection—or how was it that Dick, and only Dick, was to be seen there?

How was it, too, when he looked round, there was the boy still sitting there. It could not be Dick, evidently, that he saw in the glass. Besides, the reflection opposite him moved when he moved, returned when he returned, copied his every gesture!

He turned round upon his son with angry and yet hopeful suspicion.

"You, you've been playing some of your infernal tricks with this mirror, sir," he cried, fiercely. "What have you done to it?"

"Done! how could I do anything to it? As if you didn't know that!"

"Then," stammered Paul, determined to know the worst, "then do you, do you mean to tell me you can see any—alteration in me? Tell me the truth now!"

"I should just think I could!" said Dick, emphatically. "It's very queer, but just look here," and he came up to the sideboard and placed himself by the side of his horrified father. "Why," he said, with another giggle, "we're—he-he—as like as two peas!"

They were indeed; the glass reflected now two small boys, each with chubby cheeks and fair hair, both dressed, too, exactly alike, in Eton jackets and broad white collars; the only difference to be seen between them was that, while one face wore an expression of intense glee and satisfaction, the other—the one which Mr. Bultitude was beginning to fear must belong to him—was lengthened and drawn with dismay and bewilderment.

"Dick," said Paul, faintly, "what is all this? Who has been taking these liberties with me?"

"I'm sure I don't know," protested Dick. "It wasn't me. I believe you did it all yourself."

"Did it all myself!" repeated Paul, indignantly. "Is it likely I should? It's some trickery, I tell you, some villainous plot. The worst of it is," he added, plaintively, "I don't understand who I'm supposed to be now. Dick, who am I?"

"You can't be me," said Dick, authoritatively, "because here I am, you know. And you're not yourself, that's very plain. You must be somebody, I suppose," he added, dubiously.

"Of course I am. What do you mean?" said Paul, angrily. "Never mind who I am. I feel just the same as I always did. Tell me when you first began to notice any change. Could you see it coming on at all, eh?"

"It was all at once, just as you were talking about school and all that. You said you only wished—— Why, of course; look here, it must be the stone that did it!"

"Stone! what stone?" said Paul. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do—the Garudâ stone! You've got it in your hand still. Don't you see? It's a real talisman, after all. How jolly!"

"I didn't do anything to set it off; and besides, oh, it's perfectly absurd! How can there be such things as talismans nowadays, eh? Tell me that."

"Well, something's happened to you, hasn't it? And it must have been done somehow," argued Dick.

"I was holding the confounded thing, certainly," said Paul; "here it is. But what could I have said to start it? What has it done this to me for?"

"I know," cried Dick. "Don't you remember? You said you wished you were a boy again, like me. So you are, you see, exactly like me! What a lark it is, isn't it? But, I say, you can't go up to business like that, you know, can you? I tell you what, you'd better come to Grimstone's with me now, and see how you like it. I shouldn't mind so much if you came, too. Grimstone's face would be splendid when he saw two of us. Do come!"

"That's ridiculous nonsense you're talking," said Paul, "and you know it. What should I do at school at my age? I tell you I'm the same as ever inside, though I may have shrunk into a miserable little rascally boy to look at. And it's simply an abominable nuisance, Dick, that's what it is! Why on earth couldn't you let the stone alone? Just see what mischief you've done by meddling now—put me to all this inconvenience!"

"You shouldn't have wished," said Dick.

"Wished!" echoed Mr. Bultitude. "Why, to be sure," he said, with a gleam of returning hopefulness; "of course, I never thought of that. The thing's a wishing-stone; it must be! You have to hold it, I suppose, and then say what you wish aloud, and there you are. If that's the case, I can soon put it all right by simply wishing myself back again. I—I shall have a good laugh at all this by and by—I know I shall!"

He took the stone, and got into a corner by himself, where he began repeating the words: "I wish I was back again," "I wish I was the man I was five minutes ago," "I wish all this had not happened," and so on, until he was exhausted and red in the face. He tried with the stone held in his left hand, as well as his right, sitting and standing, all the various conditions he could think of, but absolutely nothing came of it; he was just as exasperatingly boyish and youthful as ever at the end of it.

"I don't like this," he said at last, giving it up with a rather crestfallen air. "It seems to me that this diabolical invention has got out of order somehow; I can't make it work any more!"

"Perhaps," suggested Dick, who had shown throughout the most unsympathetic cheerfulness, "perhaps it's one of those talismans that only give you one wish, and you've had it, you know?"

"Then it's all over!" groaned Paul. "What the deuce am I to do? What shall I do? Suggest something, for Heaven's sake; don't stand cackling there in that unfeeling manner.

Can't you see what a terrible mess I've got into? Suppose—only suppose your sister or one of the servants were to come in, and see me like this!"

This suggestion simply enchanted Dick.

"Let's have them all up," he laughed; "it would be such fun! How they will laugh when we tell them!" And he rushed to the bell.

"Touch that bell if you dare!" screamed Paul. "I won't be seen in this condition by anybody! What on earth could have induced that scoundrelly uncle of yours to bring such a horrible thing as this over I can't imagine! I never heard of such a situation as this in my life. I can't stay like this, you know—it's not to be thought of! I—I wonder whether it would be any use to send over to Dr. Bustard and ask him to step in; he might give me something to bring me round. But then the whole neighborhood would hear about it! If I don't see my way out of this soon, I shall go raving mad!"

And he paced restlessly up and down the room with his brain on fire.

All at once, as he became able to think more coherently, there occurred to him a chance, slender and desperate enough, but still a chance, of escaping even yet the consequences of his folly.

He was forced to conclude that, however improbable and fantastic it might appear in this rationalistic age, there must be some hidden power in this Garudâ stone which had put him in his present very unpleasant position. It was plain, too, that the virtues of the talisman refused to exert themselves any more at his bidding.

But it did not follow that in another's hands the spell would remain as powerless. At all events, it was an experiment well worth the trial, and he lost no time in explaining the notion to Dick, who, by the sparkle in his eyes and suppressed excitement in his manner, seemed to think there might be something in it.

"I may as well try," he said. "give it to me."

"Take it, my dear boy," said Paul, with a parental air that sorely tried Dick's recovered gravity, it contrasted so absurdly with his altered appearance. "Take it, and wish your poor old father himself again!"

Dick took it, and held it thoughtfully for some moments, while Paul waited in nervous impatience.

"Isn't it any use?" he said, dolefully, at last, as nothing happened.

"I don't know," said Dick, calmly, "I haven't wished yet."

"Then do so at once," said Paul, fussily, "do so at once. There's no time to waste, every moment is of importance—your cab will be here directly. Although, although I'm al-

tered in this ridiculous way, I hope I still retain my authority as a father, and, as a father, by Gad, I expect you to obey me, sir!"

"Oh, all right," said Dick, indifferently; "you may keep the authority if you like."

"Then do what I tell you. Can't you see how urgent it is that a scandal like this shouldn't get about? I should be the laughing-stock of the city. Not a soul must ever guess that such a thing has happened. You must see that yourself."

"Yes," said Dick, who all this time was sitting on a corner of the table, swinging his legs, "I see that. It will be all right. I'm going to wish in a minute, and no one will guess there has been anything the matter."

"That's a good boy!" said Paul, much relieved, "I know your heart is in the right place—only do make haste."

"I suppose," Dick asked, "when you are yourself again, things would go on just as usual?"

"I—I hope so."

"I mean you will go on sitting here, and I shall go off to Grimstone's?"

"Of course, of course," said Paul; "don't ask so many questions. I'm sure you quite understand what has to be done, so get on. We might be found like this any minute."

"That settles it," said Dick, "any fellow would do it after that."

"Yes, yes, but you're so slow about it!"

"Don't be in a hurry," said Dick, "you mayn't like it after all when I've done it."

"Done what?" asked Mr. Bultitude, sharply, struck by something sinister and peculiar in the boy's manner.

"Well, I don't mind telling you," said Dick; "it's fairer. You see, you wished to be a boy just like me, didn't you?"

"I didn't mean it," protested Paul.

"Ah, you couldn't expect a stone to know that; at any rate, it made you into a boy just like me directly. Now, if I wish myself a man just like you were ten minutes ago, before you took the stone, that will put things all right again, won't it?"

"Is the boy mad?" cried Paul, horrified at this proposal. "Why, why, that would be worse than ever."

"I don't see that," objected Dick, stubbornly. "No one would know anything about it then."

"But, you little blockhead, can't I make you understand? It wouldn't do at all. We should both of us be wrong then—each with the other's personal appearance."

"Well," said Dick, blandly, "I shouldn't mind that."

"But I should—I mind very much. I object strongly to such a—such a preposterous arrangement. And what's more, I won't

have it. Do you hear, I forbid you to think of any such thing. Give me back that stone. I can't trust you with it after this."

"I can't help it," said Dick, doggedly. "You've had your wish, and I don't see why I shouldn't have mine. I mean to have it, too."

"Why, you unnatural little rascal!" cried the justly-enraged father, "do you mean to defy me? I tell you I will have that stone! Give it up this instant!" and he made a movement toward his son, as if he meant to recover the talisman by main force.

But Dick was too quick for him. Slipping off the table with great agility, he planted himself firmly on the hearth-rug, with the hand that held the stone clenched behind his back, and the other raised in self-defense.

"I'd much rather you wouldn't make me hit you, you know," he said, "because, in spite of what's happened, you're still my father, I suppose. But, if you interfere with me before I've done with this stone, I'm afraid I shall have to punch your head."

Mr. Bultitude retreated a few steps apprehensively, feeling himself no match for his son, except in size and general appearance; and for some moments of really frightful intensity they stood panting on the hearth-rug, each cautiously watching the other, on his guard against stratagem and surprise.

It was one of those painful domestic scenes which are fortunately rare between father and son.

Overhead, the latest rollicking French polka was being rattled out, with a savage irony of which pianos, even by the best makers, can at times be capable.

Suddenly Dick drew himself up.

"Stand out of my way!" he cried, excitedly, "I am going to do it. I wish I was a man like you were just now!"

And as he spoke, Mr. Bultitude had the bitterness of seeing his unscrupulous son swell out like the frog in the fable, till he stood there before him the exact duplicate of what Paul had so lately been!

The transformed Dick began to skip and dance round the room in high glee, with as much agility as his increased bulk would allow.

"It's all right, you see," he said. "The old stone's as good as ever. You can't say any one would ever know, to look at us."

And then he threw himself panting into a chair, and began to laugh excitedly at the success of his unprincipled manœuvre.

As for Paul, he was perfectly furious at having been so outwitted and overreached. It was a long time before he could command his voice sufficiently to say, savagely:

"Well, you've had your way, and a pretty mess you've made of it. We're both of us in false positions now. I hope you're satisfied, I'm sure. Do you think you'll care about going back to Crichton House in that state?"

"No," said Dick, very decidedly; "I'm quite sure I shouldn't."

"Well, I can't help it. You've brought it on yourself; and, provided the doctor sees no objection to take you back as you are and receive you as one of his pupils, I shall most certainly send you there."

Paul did not really mean this, he only meant to frighten him; for he still trusted that, by letting Boaler into the secret, the charm might be set in motion once more, and the difficulty comfortably overcome. But his threat had a most unfortunate effect upon Dick; it hardened him to take a course he might otherwise have shrunk from.

"Oh," he said, "you're going to do that? But doesn't it strike you that things are rather altered with us now?"

"They are, to a certain extent, of course," said Paul, "through my folly and your wicked cunning; but a word or two of explanation from me——"

"You'll find it will take more explanation than you think," said Dick; "but, of course, you can try, if you think it worth while, when you get to Grimstone's."

"When I—I don't understand. When I—what did you say?" gasped Paul.

"Why, you see," exclaimed Dick, "it would never have done for both of us to go back; the chaps would have humbugged us so, and, as I hate the place, and you seem so fond of being a boy and going back to school and that, I thought perhaps it would be best for you to go and see how you liked it!"

"I never will! I'll not stir from this room! I dare you to try to move me!" cried Paul.

And just then there was the sound of wheels outside once more. They stopped before the house, the bell rang sharply—the long-expected cab had come at last.

"You've no time to lose," said Dick, "get your coat on."

Mr. Bultitude tried to treat the affair as a joke. He laughed a ghastly little laugh.

"Ha! ha! you've fairly caught your poor old father this time; you've proved him in the wrong. I admit I said more than I exactly meant. But that's enough. Don't drive a good joke too far; shake hands, and let us see if we can't find a way out of this!"

But Dick only warmed his coat-tails at the fire as he said, with a very ungenerous reminiscence of his father's manner:

"You are going back to an excellent establishment, where

you will enjoy all the comforts of home—I can particularly recommend the stickjaw; look out for it on Tuesdays and Fridays. You will once more take part in the games and lessons of happy boyhood. (Did you ever play 'chevy' when you were a boy before? You'll enjoy chevy.) And you will find your companions easy enough to get on with, if you don't go giving yourself airs; they won't stand airs. Now good-by, my boy, and bless you!"

Paul stood staring stupidly at this outrageous assumption; he could scarcely believe even yet that it was meant in cruel earnest. Before he could answer, the door opened and Boaler appeared.

"Had a deal of trouble to find a keb, sir, on a night like this," he said to the false Dick, "but the luggage is all on top, and the man says there is plenty of time still."

"Good-by, then, my boy," said Dick, with well-assumed tenderness, but a rather dangerous light his eye. "Remember, I expect you to work."

Paul turned indignantly from him to the butler; he, at least, would stand by him. Boaler would not see a master who had always been fair, if not indulgent, to him driven from his home in this cold-blooded manner!

He made two or three attempts to speak, for his brain whirled so with scathing, burning things to say. He would expose the fraud then and there, and defy the impudent usurper; he would warn every one against this spurious, pinchbeck imitation of himself. The whole household should be summoned and called upon to judge between the two!

No doubt, if he had had enough self-command to do all this effectually, while Dick had as yet not had the time to thoroughly adapt himself to his altered circumstances, he might have turned the situation at the outset, and spared himself some very painful experiences.

But it is very often precisely those words which are the most vitally important to be said that refuse to pass our lips on a sudden emergency. We feel all the necessity of saying something at once, but the necessary words unaccountably desert us at the critical moment.

Mr. Bultitude felt himself in this unfortunate position. He made more wild efforts to explain, but the sense of his danger only petrified his mind instead of stimulating it. Then he was spared further conflict. A dark mist rose before his eyes; the walls of the room receded into infinite space; and, with a loud singing in his ears, he fell, and seemed to be sinking down, down, through the earth to the very crust of the antipodes. Then the blackness closed over him—and he knew no more.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE TOILS.

"I beseech you let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation, for I never knew so young a body with so old a head."—*Merchant of Venice*, Act iv.

When Mr. Bultitude recovered his senses, which was not for a considerable time, he found that he was being jolted along through a broad, well-lit thoroughfare, in a musty four-wheeler.

His head was by no means clear yet, and for some minutes he hardly could be said to think at all; he merely lay back dreamily listening to the hard, grinding jar of the cab windows vibrating in their grooves.

His first distinct sensation was a vague wonder what Barbara might be intending to give him for dinner, for, oddly enough, he felt far from hungry, and was conscious that his palate would require the adroitest witching.

With the thought of dinner his dining-room was almost inseparably associated, and then, with an instant rush of recollection, the whole scene there with the Garudâ stone surged into his brain. He shuddered as it did so; it had all been so real, so hideously vivid and coherent throughout. But all unpleasant impressions soon yielded to the delicious luxury of his present security.

As his last conscious moment had been passed in his own dining-room, the fact that he opened his eyes in a cab, instead of confirming his worst fears, actually helped to restore the unfortunate old gentleman's serenity; for he frequently drove home from the city in this manner, and believed himself now, instead of being, as was actually the case, in that marvelous region of cheap photography, rocking-horses, mild stone lions, and wheels and ladders—the Euston Road—to be bowling along Holborn.

Now that he was thoroughly awake, he found positive amusement in going over each successive incident of his night-mare experience with the talisman, and smiling at the tricks his imagination had played him.

"I wonder now how the dickens I came to dream such outrageous nonsense!" he said to himself, for even his dreams were, as a rule, within the bounds of probability. But he was not long in tracing it to the deviled kidneys he had had at the club for lunch, and some curious old brown sherry Robinson had given him afterward at his office.

"Gad, what a shock the thing has given me!" he thought. "I can hardly shake off the feeling even now."

As a rule, after waking up on the verge of a fearful crisis, the effect of the horror fades swiftly away, as one detail after another evades a memory which is never too anxious to retain them, and each moment brings a deeper sense of relief and self-congratulation.

But in Paul's case, curiously enough, as he could not help thinking, the more completely roused he became, the greater grew his uneasiness.

Perhaps the first indication of the truth was suggested to him by a lurking suspicion—which he tried to dismiss as mere fancy—that he filled rather less of the cab than he had always been accustomed to do.

To reassure himself he set his thoughts to review all the proceedings of that day, feeling that, if he could satisfactorily account for the time up to his taking the cab, that would be conclusive as to the unreality of anything that appeared to have happened later in his own house. He got on well enough till he came to the hour at which he had left the office, and then, search his memory as he would, he could not remember hailing any cab!

Could it be another delusion, too, or was it the fact that he had found himself much pressed for time and had come home by the Underground to Praed Street? It must have been the day before, but that was Sunday. Saturday, then? But the recollection seemed too recent and fresh; and besides, on Saturday he had left at two, and had taken Barbara to see Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke's performance.

Slowly, insidiously, but with irresistible force, the conviction crept upon him that he had dined, and dined well.

"If I have dined already," he told himself, "I can't be going home to dinner; and, if I am not going home to dinner, what—what am I doing in this cab?"

The bare idea that something might be wrong with him after all made him impatient to put an end to all suspense. He must knock this scotched nightmare once for all on the head by a deliberate appeal to his senses.

The cab had passed the lighted shops now, and was driving between squares and private houses, so that Mr. Bultitude had to wait until the sickly rays of a street lamp glanced into the cab for a moment, and, as they did so, he put his feet upon the opposite seat and examined his boots and trousers with breathless eagerness.

It was not to be denied; they were not his ordinary boots, nor did he ever wear such trousers as he saw above them! Always a careful and punctiliously neat old gentleman, he was

more than commonly exacting concerning the make and polish of his boots and the set of his trousers.

These boots were clumsy, square-toed, and thick-soled; one was even patched on the side. The trousers were heavy and rough, of the kind advertised as "wear-resisting fabrics, suitable for youths at school," frayed at the ends, and shiny—shamefully shiny—about the knees!

In hot despair he rapidly passed his hands over his person. It felt unusually small and slim, Mr. Bultitude being endowed with what is euphemistically termed a "presence," and it was with an agony rarely felt at such a discovery that he realized that, for the first time for more than twenty years, he actually had a waist.

Then, as a last resource, he took off his hat and felt for the broad, smooth, egg-like surface, garnished by scanty side patches of thin hair, which he knew he ought to find.

It was gone—hidden under a crop of thick, close-curling locks!

This last disappointment completely overcame him; he had a kind of short fit in the cab as the bitter truth was brought home to him unmistakably.

Yes, this was no dream of a distempered digestion, but sober reality, The whole of that horrible scene in the dining-room had really taken place; and now he, Paul Bultitude the widely respected merchant of Mincing Lane, a man of means and position, was being ignominiously packed off to school as if he were actually the schoolboy some hideous juggle had made him appear!

It was only with a violent effort that he could succeed in commanding his thoughts sufficiently to decide on some immediate action. "I must be cool," he kept muttering to himself, with shaking lips, "quite cool and collected. Everything will depend on that now!"

It was some comfort to him in this extremity to recognize on the box the well-known broad back of Clegg, a cabman who stabled his two horses in some mews near Praed Street, and whom he had been accustomed to patronize in bad weather for several years.

Clegg would know him in spite of his ridiculous transformation.

His idea was to stop the cab and turn round and drive home again, when they would find that he was not to be got rid of again quite so easily. If Dick imagined he meant to put up tamely with this kind of treatment he was vastly mistaken; he would return home bodily and claim his rights!

No reasonable person could be perverse enough to doubt his identity when once matters came to the proof; though at first,

of course, he might find a difficulty in establishing it. His children, his clerks, and his servants would soon get used to his appearance, and would learn to look below the mere surface, and then there was always the possibility of putting everything right by means of the magic stone.

"I won't lose a minute!" he said aloud; and, letting down the window, leaned out and shouted "Stop!" till he was hoarse.

But Clegg either could not or would not hear; he drove on at full speed, a faster rate of progress than that adopted by most drivers of four-wheeled cabs being one of his chief recommendations.

They were now passing Euston. It was a muggy, slushy night, with a thin, brown fog wreathing the houses, and fading away above their tops into a dull, slate-blue sky. The wet street looked like a black canal; the blurred forms, less like vehicles than nondescript boats, moving over its inky surface, were indistinctly reflected therein; the gas-lights flared redly through the murky haze. It was not a pleasant evening in which to be out of doors.

Paul would have opened the cab-door and jumped out had he dared, but his nerve failed him, and, indeed, considering the speed of the cab, the leap would have been dangerous to a far more active individual. So he was forced to wait resignedly until the station should be reached, when he determined to make Clegg understand his purpose with as little loss of time as possible.

"I must pay him something extra," he thought; "I'll give him a sovereign to take me back." And he searched his pockets for the loose coin he usually carried about him in such abundance; there was no gold in any of them.

He found, however, a variety of miner and less negotiable articles, which he fished out one by one from unknown depths —a curious collection. There were a stumpy German-silver pencil-case, a broken prism from a crystal chandelier, a gilded Jew's harp, a little book in which the leaves, on being turned briskly, gave a semblance of motion to the sails of a black windmill drawn therein, a broken tin soldier, some Hong-Kong coppers with holes in them, and a quantity of little cogged wheels from the inside of a watch; while a further search was rewarded by an irregular lump of toffee imperfectly infolded in sticky brown paper.

He threw the whole of these treasures out of the window with indescribable disgust, and, feeling something like a purse in a side-pocket, opened it eagerly.

It held five shillings exactly, the coins corresponding to those he had pushed across to his son such a little while ago! It did

not seem to him quite such a magnificent sum now as it had done then; he had shifted his point of view.

It was too clear that the stone must have carried out his thoughtless wish with scrupulous and conscientious exactness in every detail. He had wanted, or said he wanted, to be a boy again like Dick, and accordingly he had become a perfect duplicate, even to the contents of the pockets. Evidently nothing on the face of things showed the slightest difference. Yet—and here lay the sting of the metamorphosis—he was conscious under it all of being his old original self, in utter discordance with the youthful form in which he was an unwilling prisoner.

By this time the cab had driven up the sharp incline, and under the high pointed archway of St. Pancras terminus, and now drew up with a jerk against the steps leading to the booking-office.

Paul sprang out at once in a violent passion. "Here, you, Clegg!" he said, "why the devil didn't you pull up when I told you, eh?"

Clegg was a burly, red-faced man, with a husky voice and a general manner which conveyed the impression that he regarded teetotalism, as a principle, with something more than disapproval.

"Why didn't I pull up?" he said, bending stiffly down from his box. "'Cause I didn't want to lose a good customer, that's why I didn't pull up!"

"Do you mean to say you don't know me?"

"Know yer?" said Clegg, with an approach to sentiment; "I've knowed yer when you was a babby in frocks. I've knowed yer fust nuss (and a fine young woman she were till she took to drinking, as has been the ruin of many). I've knowed yer in Infancy's hour and in yer byhood's bloom! I've druv yer to this 'ere werry station twice afore. Know yer!"

Paul saw the uselessness of arguing with him. "Then, ah—drive me back at once. Let those boxes alone. I—I've important business at home which I'd forgotten."

Clegg gave a vinous wink. "Lor, yer at it agin," he said, with admiration. "What a artful young gent it is! But it ain't what yer may call good enough, so to speak, it ain't. Clegg, don't do that no more!"

"Don't do what?" asked Paul.

"Don't drive no young gents as is a bein' sent to school back agin into their family's bosims," said Clegg, sententiously. "You was took ill sudden in my cab the larst time. Offal bad you was, to be sure, to hear ye, and I druv yer back; and I never got no return fare, I didn't, and yer par he made hisself downright nasty over it, said as if it occurred agin he shouldn't

employ me no more. I durstn't go and offend yer par; he's a good customer to me, he is."

"I'll give you a sovereign to do it," said Paul.

"If yer wouldn't tell no tales, I might put yer down at the corner p'raps," said Clegg, hesitating, to Paul's joy; "not as it ain't cheap at that, but let's see yer suffering fust. Why," he cried, with lofty contempt as he saw from Paul's face that the coin was not producible, "y'aint got no suffering! Garn away, and don't try to tempt a pore cabby as has a livin' to make! What d'ye think of this, porter, now? 'Ere's a young gent a tryin' to back out o' going to school when he ought to be glad and thankful as he's receivin' the blessin's of a good eddication. Look at me. I'm a 'ard workin'-man, I am. I aint 'ad no eddication. The kids, they're a learnin' French, and free'and drorin, and the bones on a skellington at the Board School, and I pays my coppers down every week cheerful. And why, porter? Why, young master? 'Cause I knows the vally on it! But when I sees a real young gent a despisin' of the oppertoonities as a bountiful Providence and a excellent par has 'eaped on his 'ed, it—it makes me sick, it inspires Clegg with a pity and a contemp' for such ingratitood, which he cares not for to 'ide from public voo!"

Clegg delivered this harangue with much gesture and in a loud tone, which greatly edified the porters and disgusted Mr. Bultitude.

"Go away," said the latter, "that's enough. You're drunk!"

"Drunk!" bellowed the outraged Clegg, rising on the box in his wrath. "'Ear that. 'Ark at this 'ere young cock sparrer as tells a fam'ly man like Clegg as he's drunk! Drunk, after drivin' his par in this 'ere werry cab through frost and fine fifteen year or more. I wonder yer don't say the old 'orse is drunk; you'll be sayin' that next! Drunk! oh, cert'nly, by all means. Never you darken my cab doors no more. I shall take and tell your par, I shall. Drunk, indeed! A ill-conditioned young wiper as ever I see. Drunk! yah!"

And with much cursing and growling, Clegg gathered up his reins and drove off into the fog, Boaler having apparently prepaid the fare.

"Where for, sir, please?" said a porter, who had been putting the playbox and portmanteau on a truck during the altercation.

"Nowhere," said Mr. Bultitude. "I—I'm not going by this train; find me a cab with a sober driver."

The porter looked round. A moment before there had been several cabs discharging their loads at the steps; now the last had rolled away empty.

"You might find one inside the station by the arrival plat-

form," he suggested; "but there'll be sure to be one comin' up here in another minute, sir, if you like to wait."

Paul thought the other course might be the longer one, and decided to stay where he was. So he walked into the lofty hall in which the booking-offices are placed, and waited there by the huge fire that blazed in the stove until he should hear the cab arrive which could take him back to Westbourne Terrace.

One or two trains were about to start, and the place was full. There were several Cambridge men "going up" after the Christmas vacation, in every variety of ulster; some tugging at refractory white terriers, one or two intrusting tall bright bicycles to dubious porters with many cautions and directions. There were burly old farmers going back to their quiet country-side, flushed with the prestige of a successful stand under cross-examination in some witness-box at Lincoln's Inn; to tell and retell the story over hill and dale, in the market-place and bar-parlor, every week for the rest of their honest lives. There was the usual pantomime "rally" on a mild scale, with real frantic passengers, and porters, and trucks, and trays of lighted lamps.

Presently, out of the crowd and confusion, a small boy, in a thick pilot-jacket and an immensely tall hat, whom Paul had observed looking at him intently for some time, walked up to the stove and greeted him familiarly.

"Hallo, Bultitude!" he said, "I thought it was you. Here we are again, eh? Ugh!" and he giggled dismally.

He was a pale-faced boy with spectacles, very light green eyes, long, rather ragged black hair, a slouching walk, and a smile half-simpering, half-impudent.

Mr. Bultitude was greatly staggered by the presumption of so small a boy venturing to address him in this way. He could only stare haughtily.

"You might find a word to say to a fellow!" said the boy in an aggrieved tone. "Look here; come and get your baggage labeled."

"I don't want it labeled," said Paul, stiffly, feeling bound to say something. "I'm waiting for a cab to take me home again."

The other gave a loud whistle.

"That'll make it rather a short term, won't it, if you're going home for the holidays already? You're a cool chap, Bultitude! If I were to go back to my governor now, he wouldn't see it. It would put him to no end of a bait. But you're chaffing——"

Paul walked away from him with marked coolness. He was not going to trouble himself to talk to his son's schoolfellows.

"Ain't you well?" said the boy, not at all discouraged by his reception, following him and taking his arm. "Down in the mouth? It is beastly, isn't it, having to go back to old Grim-

stone's? The snow gave us an extra week, though—we've much to be thankful for. I wish it was the first day of the holidays, don't you? What's the matter with you? What have I done to put you in a wax?"

"Nothing at present," said Paul. "I don't speak to you, merely because I don't happen to have the—an—pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Oh, very well, then; I dare say you know best," said the other, huffily. "Only I thought—considering we came the same half, and have been chums, and always set next one another ever since—you might perhaps just recollect having met me before, you know."

"Well, I don't," said Mr. Bultitude. "I tell you I haven't the least idea what your name is. The fact is, there has been a slight mistake, which I can't stop to talk about now. There's a cab just driven up outside now. You must excuse me, really, my boy, I want to go."

He tried to work his arm free from the close and affectionate grip of his unwelcome companion, who was regarding him with a sort of admiring leer.

"What a fellow you are, Bultitude!" he said; "always up to something or other. You know me well enough. I'm Jolland. What is the use of keeping it up any longer? Let's talk, and stop humbugging. How much grub have you brought back this time?"

To be advised to stop humbugging, and be persecuted with such idle questions as these, maddened the poor gentleman. A hansom really had rolled up to the steps outside. He must put an end to this waste of precious time, and escape from this highly inconvenient small boy.

He forced his way to the door, the boy still keeping fast hold of his arm. Fortunately the cab was still there, and its late occupant, a tall, broad man, was standing with his back to them, paying the driver. Paul was only just in time.

"Porter!" he cried. "Where's that porter? I want my box put on that cab. No, I don't care about the luggage; engage the cab. Now, you little ruffian, are you going to let me go? Can't you see I'm anxious to get away?"

Jolland giggled more impishly than ever.

"Well, you have got cheek!" he said. "Go on, I wish you may get that cab, I'm sure!"

Paul, thus released, was just hurrying toward the cab, when the stranger who had got out of it, settled the fare with satisfaction to himself, and turned sharply round.

The gaslight fell full on his face, and Mr. Bultitude recognized that the form and features were those of no stranger—he had stumbled upon the very last person he had expected or de-

sired to meet just then—his flight was intercepted by his son's schoolmaster, Dr. Grimstone himself!

The suddenness of the shock threw him completely off his balance. In an ordinary way the encounter would not, of course, have discomposed him; but now he would have given worlds for presence of mind enough either to rush past to the cab, and secure his only chance of freedom before the doctor had fully realized his intention, or else greet him affably and calmly, and, taking him quietly aside, explain his awkward position with an easy, man-of-the-world air, which would insure instant conviction.

Both courses were equally impossible. He stood there, right in Dr. Grimstone's path, with terrified, starting eyes and quivering limbs, more like an unhappy guinea-pig expecting the advance of a boa, than a British merchant in the presence of his son's schoolmaster! He was sick and faint with alarm, and the consciousness that appearances were all against him.

There was nothing in the least extraordinary in the fact of the doctor's presence at the station. Mr. Bultitude might easily have taken this into account as a very likely contingency and have provided accordingly, had he troubled to think, for it was Dr. Grimstone's custom, upon the first day of the term, to come up to town and meet as many of his pupils upon the platform as intended to return by a train previously specified at the foot of the school-bills; and Paul had even expressly insisted upon Dick's traveling under surveillance in this manner, thinking it necessary to keep him out of premature mischief.

It makes a calamity doubly hard to bear when one looks back and sees by what a trivial chance it has come upon us, and how slight an effort would have averted it altogether; and Mr. Bultitude cursed his own stupidity as he stood there, rooted to the ground, and saw the hansom (a "patent safety" to him in sober earnest) drive off and abandon him to his fate.

Dr. Grimstone bore down heavily upon him and Jolland, who had by this time come up. He was a tall and imposing personage, with a strong black beard and small, angry gray eyes, slightly blood-tinged; he wore garments of a semi-clerical cut and color, though he was not in orders. He held out a hand to each with elaborate geniality.

"Ha, Bultitude, my boy, how are you? How are you, Jolland? Come back, braced in body and mind by your vacation, eh? That's as it should be. Have you tickets? No? follow me, then. You're both over age, I believe. There you are; take care of them."

And, before Paul could protest, he had purchased tickets for all three, after which he had laid an authoritative hand upon

Mr. Bultitude's shoulder and walked him out through the booking-hall upon the platform.

"This is awful," thought Paul, shrinking involuntarily; "simply awful. He evidently has no idea who I really am. Unless I'm very careful I shall be dragged off to Crichton House before I can put him right. If I could only get him away alone somewhere."

As if in answer to the wish, the doctor guided him by a slight pressure straight along by the end of the station, saying to Jolland as he did so, "I wish to have a little serious conversation with Richard in private. Suppose you go to the bookstall and see if you can find out any of our young friends. Tell them to wait for me there."

When they were alone the doctor paced solemnly along in silence for some moments, while Paul, who had always been used to consider himself a fairly prominent object, whatever might be his surroundings, began to feel an altogether novel sensation of utter insignificance upon that immense brown plain of platform and under the huge span of the arches whose girders were lost in wreaths of mingled fog and smoke.

Still he had some hope. Was it possible, after all, that the doctor had divined his secret, and was searching for words delicate enough to convey his condolences?

"I wished to tell you, Bultitude," said the doctor presently, and his first words dashed all Paul's rising hopes, "that I hear you are returning this term with the resolve to do better things. You have caused your excellent father much pain in the past. You little know the grief a willful boy can inflict upon his parent."

"I think I have a very fair idea of it," thought Paul, but he said nothing.

"I hope you left him in good health? Such a devoted parent, Richard—such a noble heart!"

At any other time Mr. Bultitude might have felt gratified by these eulogies, but just then he was conscious that he could lay no claim to them. It was Dick who had the noble heart now, and he himself felt less of a devoted parent even than he looked.

"I had a letter from him during the vacation," continued Dr. Grimstone; "a sweet letter, Richard, breathing in every line a father's anxiety and concern for your welfare."

Paul was a little staggered. He remembered having written, but he would scarcely perhaps have described his letter as "sweet," as he had not done much more than enclose a check for his son's acount and object to the items for pew-rent and scientific lectures with the diorama as excessive.

"But—and this is what I wanted to say to you, Bultitude—his is no blind, doting affection. He has implored me, for your

own sake, if I see you diverging ever so slightly from the path of duty, not to stay my hand. And I shall not forget his injunctions."

A few minutes ago, and it would have seemed to Paul so simple and easy a matter to point out to the doctor the very excusable error into which he had fallen. It was no more than he would have to do repeatedly upon his return, and here was an excellent opportunity for an explanation.

But, somehow, the words would not come. The schoolmaster's form seemed so tremendous and towering, and he so feeble and powerless before him, that he soon persuaded himself that a public place, like a station platform, was no scene for domestic revelations of so painful a character.

He gave up all idea of resistance at present. "Perhaps I had better leave him in his error till we get into the train," he thought; "then we will get rid of that other boy, and I can break it gradually in the railway carriage as I get more accustomed to him."

But, in spite of his determination to unbosom himself without further delay, he knew that a kind of fascinated resignation was growing upon him and gaining firmer hold each minute.

Something must be done to break the spell and burst the toils which were being woven round him, before all effort became impossible.

"And now," said the doctor, glancing up at the great clock-face on which a reflector cast a patch of dim yellow light, "we must be thinking of starting. But don't forget what I have said."

And they walked back toward the bookstalls with their cheery warmth of color, past the glittering buffet, and on up the platform, to a part where six boys of various sizes were standing huddled forlornly together under a gaslight.

"Aha!" said Dr. Grimstone, with a slight touch of the ogre in his tone, "more of my fellows, eh? We shall be quite a party. How do you do, boys? Welcome back to your studies!"

And the six boys came forward, all evidently in the lowest spirits, and raised their tall hats with a studied politeness.

"Some old friends, Bultitude," said the doctor, impelling the unwilling Paul toward the group. "You know Tipping, of course; Coker, too, you've met before—and Coggs. How are you, Siggers? You're looking well. Ah, by the way, I see a new face—Kiffin, I think? Kiffin, this is Master Bultitude, who will make himself your mentor, I hope, and initiate you into our various manners and customs."

And, with a horrible dream-like sense of unreality, Mr. Bulti-

tude found himself being greeted by several entire strangers with a degree of warmth embarrassing in the extreme.

He would have liked to protest and declare himself there and then in his true colors, but if this had been difficult alone with the doctor under the clock, it was impossible now, and he submitted ruefully enough to their unwelcome advances.

Tipping, a tall, red-haired, raw-boned boy, with sleeves and trousers he had outgrown, and immense boots, wrung Paul's hand with misdirected energy, saying "how-de-do?" with a gruff superiority, mercifully tempered by a touch of sheepishness.

Coggs and Coker welcomed him with open arms as an equal, while Siggers, a short, slight, sharp-featured boy, with a very fashionable hat and shirt-collar, and a horse-shoe pin, drawled, "How are you, old boy?" with the languor of a confirmed man about town.

The other two were Biddlecomb, a boy with a blooming complexion and a singularly sweet voice, and the new comer, Kiffin, who did not seem much more at home in the society of other boys than Mr. Bultitude himself, for he kept nervously away from them, shivering with the piteous self-abandonment of an Italian greyhound.

Paul was now convinced that, unless he exerted himself considerably, his identity with his son would never even be questioned, and the danger roused him to a sudden determination.

However his face and figure might belie him, nothing in his speech or conduct should encourage the mistake. Whatever it might cost him to overcome his fear of the doctor, he would force himself to act and talk ostentatiously, as much like his own ordinary self as possible, during the journey down to Rodwell Regis, so as to prepare the doctor's mind for the disclosures he meant to make at the earliest opportunity. He was beginning to see that the railway carriage, with all those boys sitting by and staring, would be an inconvenient place for so delicate and difficult a confession.

The guard having warned intending passengers to take their seats, and Jolland, who had been unaccountably missing all this time, having appeared from the direction of the refreshment buffet, furtively brushing away some suspicious-looking flakes and crumbs from his coat, and contrived to join the party unperceived, they all got into a first-class compartment—Paul with the rest.

He longed for moral courage to stand out boldly and refuse to leave town, but, as we have seen, it was beyond his powers, and he temporized. Very soon the whistle had sounded and the train had begun to glide slowly out beyond the platform and arch, past the signal-boxes and long, low sheds and offices,

which are the suburbs of a large terminus—and then it was too late.

CHAPTER IV.

A MINNOW AMONG TRITONS.

"Boys are capital fellows in their own way among their mates; but they are unwholesome companions for grown people."—*Essays of Elia.*

For some time after they were fairly started the doctor read his evening paper with an air of impartial but severe criticism, and Mr. Bultitude, as he sat opposite him next to the window, found himself overwhelmed with a new and very unpleasant timidity.

He knew that, if he would free himself, this utterly unreasonable feeling must be wrestled with and overcome; that now, if ever, was the time to assert himself, and prove that he was anything but the raw youth he was conscious of appearing. He had merely to speak and act, too, in his ordinary, every day manner; to forget as far as possible the change that had affected his outer man, which was not so very difficult to do after all—and yet his heart sank lower and lower as each fresh telegraph-post flitted past.

"I will let him speak first," he thought; "then I shall be able to feel my way."

But there was more fear than caution in the resolve.

At last, however, the doctor laid down his paper, and, looking round with the glance of proprietorship on his pupils, who had relapsed into a decorous and gloomy silence, observed:

"Well, boys, you have had an unusually protracted vacation this time, owing to the unprecedented severity of the weather. We must try to make up for it by the zest and ardor with which we pursue our studies during the term. I intend to reduce the Easter holiday by a week by way of compensation."

This announcement (which by no means relieved the general depression—the boys receiving it with a sickly interest) was good news to Paul, and even had the effect of making him forget his position for the time.

"I'm uncommonly glad to hear it, Dr. Grimstone," he said, heartily; "that's as it should be. Boys have too many holidays

as it is. There's no reason, to my mind, why parents should be the sufferers by every snow-storm. It's no joke, I can assure you, to have a great, idle boy hanging about the place eating his empty head off."

A burglar enlarging upon the sanctity of the law of property, or a sheep urging the necessity for butcher's meat, could hardly have produced a greater sensation.

Every boy was roused from his languor to stare and wonder at these traitorous sentiments, which, from the mouth of any but a known and tried companion, would have roused bitter hostility and contempt. As it was, their wonder became a rapturous admiration, and they waited for the situation to develop with a fearful and secret joy.

It was some time before the doctor quite recovered himself; then he said, with a grim smile:

"This is indeed finding Saul among the prophets; your sentiments, if sincere, Bultitude—I repeat, if sincere—are very creditable. But I am obliged to look upon them with suspicion." Then, as if to dismiss a doubtful subject, he inquired generally, "And how have you all been spending your holidays, eh?"

There was no attempt to answer this question, it being felt probably that it was, like the conventional "How do you do?" one to which an answer is neither desired nor expected, especially as he continued almost immediately:

"I took my boy Tom up to town the week before Christmas to see the representation of the 'Agamemnon' at St. George's Hall. The 'Agamemnon,' as most of you are doubtless aware, is a drama by Æschylus, a Greek poet of established reputation. I was much pleased by the intelligent appreciation Tom showed during the performance. He distinctly recognized several words from his Greek Grammar in the course of the dialogue."

No one seemed capable of responding except Mr. Bultitude, who dashed into the breach with an almost pathetic effort to maintain his accustomed stiffness.

"I may be old-fashioned," he said—"very likely I am; but I, ah, decidedly disapprove of taking children to dramatic exhibitions of any kind. It unsettles them, sir—unsettles them."

Dr. Grimstone made no answer, but he put a hand on each knee, and glared with pursed lips and a leonine bristle of the beard at his youthful critic for some moments, after which he returned to his "Globe" with a short ominous cough.

"I have offended him now," thought Paul. "I must be more careful what I say. But I'll get him into conversation again presently."

So he began at the first opportunity:

"You have this evening's paper, I see. No telegrams of importance, I suppose?"

"No, sir," said the doctor, shortly.

"I saw a report in to-day's 'Times,'" said poor Mr. Bultitude, with a desperate attempt at his most conversational and old-gentlemanly manner—"I saw a report that the camphor crop was likely to be a failure this season. Now, it's a very singular thing about camphor, that the Japanese—". He hoped to lead the conversation round to colonial prudence, and thus open the doctor's eyes by the extent of his acquaintance with the subject.

"I am already acquainted with the method of obtaining camphor, thank you, Bultitude," said the doctor, with dangerous politeness.

"I was about to observe, when you interrupted me," said Paul—"and this is really a fact that I doubt if you are aware of—that the Japanese never——"

"Well, well," said the doctor, with some impatience; "probably they never do, sir; but I shall have other opportunities of finding out what you have read about the Japanese."

But he glanced over the top of the paper at the indignant Paul, who was not accustomed to have his information received in this manner, with less suspicion and a growing conviction that some influence during the holidays had changed the boy from a graceless young scapegrace into a prig of the first water.

"He's most uncivil," Mr. Bultitude told himself—"almost insulting; but I'll go on. I'm rousing his curiosity. I'm making way with him; he sees a difference already." And so he applied himself once more.

"You're a smoker, of course, Dr. Grimstone?" he began. "We don't stop anywhere, I think, on the way, and I must confess myself, after dinner, a whiff or two—I think I can give you a cigar you'll appreciate."

And he felt for his cigar-case, really forgetting that it was gone, like all other incidents of his own self; while Jolland giggled with unstrained delight at such charming effrontery.

"If I did not know, sir," said the doctor, now effectually roused, "that this was ill-timed buffoonery and not an intentional insult, I should be seriously angry. As it is, I can overlook any exuberance of mirth, which is, perhaps, pardonable when the mind is elated by the return to the cheerful bustle and activity of school-life. But be very careful."

"He needn't be so angry," thought Paul; "how could I know he doesn't smoke? But I'm afraid he doesn't quite know me, even now."

So he began again:

"Did I hear you mention the name of Kiffin among those of your pupils here, doctor? I thought so. Not the son of Jordan Kiffin, of College Hill, surely? Yes? Why, bless my soul, your father and I, my little fellow, were old friends in days before you were born or thought of—born or thought of. He was in a very small way then, a very small—Eh, Dr. Grimstone, don't you feel well?"

"I see what you're aiming at, sir. You wish to prove to me that I'm making a mistake in my treatment of you."

"That was my idea, certainly," said Paul, much pleased. "I'm very glad you take me, doctor."

"I shall take you in a way you won't appreciate soon, if this goes on," said the doctor under his breath.

"When the time comes I shall know how to deal with you. Till then you'll have the goodness to hold your tongue," he said aloud.

"It's not a very polite way of putting it," Paul said to himself, "but, at any rate, he sees how the case stands now, and after all, perhaps, he only speaks like that to put the boys off the scent. If so, it's uncommonly considerate and thoughtful of him, by Gad. I won't say any more."

But by and by, the open window made him break his resolution.

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you, Dr. Grimstone," he said, with the air of an old gentleman used to having his way in these matters, "but I positively must ask you either to allow me to have this window up or to change places with you. The night air, sir, at this time of the year is fatal, my doctor tells me, simply fatal to a man of my constitution."

The doctor pulled up the window with a frown, and yet a somewhat puzzled expression.

"I warn you, Bultitude," he said, "you are acting very imprudently."

"So I am," thought Paul, "so I am. Good for him to remind me. I must keep it up before all these boys. This unpleasant business musn't get about. I'll hold my tongue till we get in. Then, I daresay, Grimstone will see me off by the next train up, if there is one, and lend me enough for a bed at a hotel for the night. I couldn't get to St. Pancras till very late, of course. Or he might offer to put me up at the school. If he does, I think I shall very possibly accept. It might be better."

And he leaned back in his seat in a much easier frame of mind; it was annoying, of course, to have been turned out of his warm dining-room, and sent all the way down to Rodwell Regis on a fool's errand like this; but still, if nothing worse came of it, he could put up with the temporary inconvenience,

and it was a great relief to be spared the necessity of an explanation.

The other boys watched him furtively with growing admiration, which expressed itself in subdued whispers, varied by little gurgles and "squirks" of laughter; they tried to catch his eye and stimulate him to further feats of audacity, but Mr. Bultitude, of course, repulsed all such overtures with a coldness and severity which at once baffled and piqued them.

At last his eccentricity took a shape which considerably lessened their enthusiasm. Kiffin, the new boy, occupied the seat next to Paul; he was a nervous-looking little fellow, with a pale face and big, pathetic brown eyes like a seal's, and his dress bore plain evidence of a mother's careful supervision, having all the uncreased trimness and specklessness rarely to be observed except in the toilettes of the waxen prodigies in a shop-window.

It happened that, as he lay back in the padded seat between the sheltering partitions, watching the sickly yellow dregs of oil surging dismally to and fro with the motion in the lamp overhead, or the black, indistinct forms flitting past through the misty blue outside, the pathos of his situation became all at once too much for him.

He was a home-bred boy, without any of that taste for the companionship and pursuits of his fellows, or capacity for adapting himself to their prejudices and requirements, which gives some home-bred boys a ready passport into the roughest communities.

His heart throbbed with no excited curiosity, no conscious pride, at this his first important step in life; he was a forlorn little stranger, in an unsympathetic, strange land, and was only too well aware of his position.

So that it is not surprising that, as he thought of the home he had left an hour or two ago, which now seemed so shadowy, so inaccessible and remote, his eyes began to smart and sting, and his chest to heave ominously, until he felt it necessary to do something to give a partial vent to his emotions, and prevent a public and disgraceful exhibition of grief.

Unhappily for him, he found this safety-valve in a series of suppressed but distinctly audible sniffs.

Mr. Bultitude bore this for some time with no other protest than an occasional indignant bounce or a lowering frown in the offender's direction, but at last his nerves, strung already to a high pitch by all he had undergone, could stand it no longer.

"Dr. Grimstone," he said, with polite determination, "I'm not a man to complain without good reason, but really I must ask you to interfere. Will you tell this boy here, on my right, either to control his feelings or to cry into his pocket-handkerchief, like an ordinary human being. A good honest fellow I

can understand, but this infernal whifling and sniffing, sir, I will not put up with. It's nothing less than unnatural in a boy of that size."

"Kiffin," said the doctor, "are you crying?"

"N—no, sir," faltered Kiffin; "I—I think I must have caught cold, sir."

"I hope you are telling me the truth, because I should be sorry to believe you were beginning your new life in a spirit of captiousness and rebellion. I'll have no mutineers in my camp. I'll establish a spirit of trustful happiness and unmurmuring content in this school, if I have to flog every boy in it as long as I can stand over him. As for you, Richard Bultitude, I have no words to express my pain and disgust at the heartless irreverence with which you persist in mimicking and burlesquing a fond and excellent parent. Unless I perceive, sir, in a very short time, a due sense of your error and a lively repentance, my disapproval will take a very practical form."

Mr. Bultitude fell back into his seat with a gasp. It was hard to be accused of caricaturing one's own self, particularly when conscious of entire innocence in that respect, but even this was slight in comparison with the discovery that he had been so blindly deceiving himself!

The doctor evidently had failed to penetrate his disguise, and the dreaded scene of elaborate explanation must be gone through after all.

The boys (with the exception of Kiffin) still found exquisite enjoyment in this extraordinary and original exhibition, and waited eagerly for further experiments on the doctor's patience.

They were soon gratified. If there was one thing Paul detested more than another, it was the smell of peppermint—no less than three office boys had been discharged by him because, as he alleged, they made the clerks' room reek with it—and now the subtle, searching odor of the hated confection was gradually stealing into the compartment and influencing its atmosphere.

He looked at Coggs, who sat on the seat opposite to him, and saw his cheeks and lips moving in slow and appreciative absorption of something. Coggs was clearly the culprit.

"Do you encourage your boys to make common nuisances of themselves in a public place, may I ask, Dr. Grimstone?" he inquired, fuming.

"Some scarcely seem to require encouragement, Bultitude," said the doctor, pointedly; "what is the matter now?"

"If he takes it medicinally," said Paul, "he should choose some other time and place to treat his complaint. If he has a depraved liking for the abominable stuff, for heaven's sake make him refrain from it on occasions when it is a serious annoyance to others!"

"Will you explain? Who and what are you talking about?"

"That boy opposite," said Paul, pointing the finger of denunciation at the astonished Coggs; "he's sucking an infernal peppermint lozenge strong enough to throw the train off the rails!"

"Is what Bultitude tells me true, Coggs?" demanded the doctor, in an awful voice.

Coggs, after making several attempts to bolt the offending lozenge, and turning scarlet meanwhile with confusion and coughing, stammered huskily something to the effect that he had "bought the lozenges at a chemist's," which he seemed to consider, for some reason, a mitigating circumstance.

"Have you any more of this pernicious stuff about you?" said the doctor.

Very slowly and reluctantly, Coggs brought out of one pocket after another three or four neat little white packets, made up with that lavish expenditure of time, string, and sealing wax, by which the struggling chemist seeks to reconcile the public mind to a charge of two hundred and fifty per cent. on cost price, and handed them to Dr. Grimstone, who solemnly unfastened them, one by one, glanced at their contents with infinite disgust, and flung them out of the window.

Then he turned to Paul with a look of more favor than he had yet shown him.

"Bultitude," he said, "I am obliged to you. A severe cold in the head has rendered me incapable of detecting this insidious act of insubordination and self-indulgence, on which I shall have more to say on another occasion. Your moral courage and promptness in denouncing the evil thing are much to your credit."

"Not at all," said Paul, "not at all, my dear sir. I mentioned it because I, ah, happen to be peculiarly sensitive on the subject, and——" Here he broke off with a sharp yell, and began to rub his ankle. "One of these young savages has just given me a severe kick; it's that fellow over there, with the blue necktie. I have given him no provocation, and he attacks me in this brutal manner, sir; I appeal to you for protection!"

"So, Coker" (Coker wore a blue necktie), said the doctor, "you emulate the wild ass in more qualities than those of stupidity and stubbornness, do you? You lash out with your hind legs at an inoffensive schoolfellow with all the viciousness of a kangaroo, eh? Write out all you find in Buffon's Natural History upon those two animals a dozen times, and bring it to me to-morrow evening. If I am to stable wild asses, sir, they shall be broken in!"

Six pairs of sulky, glowering eyes were fixed upon the unconscious Paul for the rest of the journey; indignant protests and dark vows of vengeance were muttered under cover of the

friendly roar and rattle of tunnels. But the object of them heard nothing; his composure was returning once more in the sunshine of Dr. Grimstone's approbation, and he almost decided on declaring himself in the station fly.

And now at last the train was grinding along discordantly with the brakes on, and, after a little preliminary jolting and banging over the points, drew up at a long, lighted platform, where melancholy porters paced up and down, croaking "Rodwell Regis!" like so many Solomon Eagles predicting woe.

Paul got out with the others, and walked forward to the guard's van, where he stood shivering in the raw night air by a small heap of portmanteaux and white, clamped boxes.

"I should like to tell him all about it now," he thought, "if he wasn't so busy. I'll get him to go in a cab alone with me, and get it over before we reach the house."

Dr Grimstone certainly did not seem in a very receptive mood for confidences just then. No flies were to be seen, which he took as a personal outrage, and visited upon the station-master in hot indignation.

"It's scandalous, I tell you," he was saying; "scandalous! No cabs to meet the train. My school reassembles to-day, and here I find no arrangements made for their accommodation! Not even an omnibus! I shall write to the manager and report this. Let some one go for a fly immediately. Boys, go into the waiting room till I come to you. Stay—there are too many for one fly. Coker, Coggs, and, let me see, yes, Bultitude, you all know your way. Walk on, and tell Mrs. Grimstone we are coming."

Mr. Bultitude was perhaps more relieved than disappointed by this postponement of a disagreeable interview, though, if he had seen Coker dig Coggs in the side with a chuckle of exultant triumph, he might have had misgivings as to the prudence of trusting himself alone with them.

As it was, he almost determined to trust the pair with his secret.

"They will be valuable witnesses," he said to himself, "that, whoever else I may be, I am not Dick."

So he went on briskly ahead over a covered bridge and down some break-neck wooden steps, and passed through the wicket out upon the railed-in space, where the cabs and omnibuses should have been, but which was now a blank, spectral waste with a white ground-fog lurking round its borders.

Here he was joined by his companions, who, after a little whispering, came up one on either side and put an arm through each of his.

"Well," said Paul, thinking to banter them agreeably; "here you are, young men, eh? Holidays all over now! Work while

you're young, and then—— Gad, you're walking me off my legs. Stop! I'm not as young as I used to be——"

"Grim can't see us here, can he, Coker?" said Coggs, when they had cleared the gates and palings.

"Not he!" said Coker.

"Very well, then. Now then, young Bultitude, you used to be a decent fellow enough last term, though you were coxy. So, before we go any further—what do you mean by this sort of thing?"

"Because," put in Coker, "if you aren't quite right in your head, through your old governor acting like a brute all the holidays, as you said he does, just say so, and we won't be hard on you."

"I—he—always an excellent father," stammered Paul. "What am I to explain?"

"Why, what did you go and sneak of *him* for bringing tuck back to school for, eh?" demanded Coker.

"Yes, and sing out when he hacked your shin?" added Coggs; "and tell Grimstone that new fellow was blubbering? Where's the joke in all that, eh? Where's the joke?"

"You don't suppose I was bound to sit calmly down and allow you to suck your villainous peppermints under my very nose, do you?" said Mr. Bultitude. "Why shouldn't I complain if a boy annoys me by sniffing, or kicks me on the ankle? Just tell me that! Suppose my neighbor has a noisy dog or a smoky chimney, am I not to venture to tell him of it? Is he to——"

But his arguments, convincing as they promised to be, were brought to a sudden and premature close by Coker, who slipped behind him and administered a smart jog below his back, which jarred his spine and caused him infinite agony.

"You little brute!" cried Paul, "I could have you up for assault for that. An old man like me, too!"

But upon this Coggs did the very same thing, only harder. "Last term you'd have shown fight for much less, Bultitude," they both observed, severely, as some justification for repeating the process.

"Now, perhaps, you'll drop it for the future," said Coker. "Look here! we'll give you one more chance. This sneaking dodge is all very well for Chawner. Chawner could do that sort of thing without getting sat upon, because he's a big fellow; but we're not going to stand it from you. Will you promise on your sacred word of honor, now, to be a decent sort of a chap again as you were last term?"

But Mr. Bultitude, though he longed for peace and quietness, dreaded doing or trying anything to favor the impression that he was the schoolboy he unluckily appeared to be, and he had not

skill and tact enough to dissemble and assume a familiar, genial tone of equality with these rough boys.

"You don't understand," he protested feebly. "If I could only tell you——"

"We don't want any fine language, you know," said the relentless Coggs. "Yes or no. Will you promise to be your old self again?"

"I only wish I could," said poor Mr. Bultitude—"but I can't!"

"Very well, then," said Coggs, firmly, "we must try the torture. Coker, will you screw the back of his hand, while I show him how they make barley-sugar?"

And he gave Paul an interesting illustration of the latter branch of industry by twisting his right arm round and round till he nearly wrenched it out of the socket, while Coker seized his left hand and pounded it vigorously with the first joint of his forefinger, causing the unfortunate Paul to yell for mercy.

At last he could bear no more, and, breaking away from his tormentors with a violent effort, he ran frantically down the silent road toward a house which he knew from former visits to be Dr. Grimstone s.

He was but languidly pursued, and, as the distance was short, he soon gained a gate on the stuccoed posts of which he could read "Crichton House," by the light of a neighboring gas-lamp.

"This is a nice way," he thought, as he reached it breathless and trembling, "for a father to visit his son's school!"

He had hoped to reach the sanctuary before the other two could overtake him, but he soon discovered that the gate was shut fast, and all his efforts would not bring him within reach of the bell-handle—he was too short.

So he sat down on the doorstep in resigned despair, and waited for his enemies. Behind the gate was a large, many-windowed house, with steps leading up to a portico. In the playground to his right the school gymnasium, a great gallows-like erection, loomed black and grim through the mist, the night wind favoring the ghastliness of its appearance by swaying the ropes till they creaked and moaned weirdly on the hooks, and the metal stirrups clinked and clashed against one another in irregular cadence.

He had no time to observe more, as Coker and Coggs joined him, and, on finding he had not rung the bell, seized the occasion to pummel him at their leisure before announcing their arrival.

Then the gate was opened, and the three—the revengeful pair assuming an air of lamb-like inoffensiveness—entered the hall, and were met by Mrs. Grimstone.

"Why, here you are!" she said, with an air of surprise, and kissing them with real kindness. "How cold you look! So you actually had to walk. No cabs as usual. Poor boys! come in and warm yourselves. You'll find all your old friends in the schoolroom."

Mr. Bultitude submitted to be kissed with some reluctance. He was a scrupulously proper and correct old gentleman, and inwardly hoped that Dr. Grimstone might never hear of it.

Mrs. Grimstone, it may be said here, was a stout, fair woman, not in the least intellectual or imposing, but with a warm heart, and a way of talking to and about boys that secured her the confidence of mothers more effectually, perhaps, than the most polished conversation and irreproachable deportment could have done.

She did not reserve her motherliness for the reception-room, either, as some schoolmasters' wives have a tendency to do, and the smallest boy felt less homesick when he saw her.

She opened a green-baize outer door, and the door beyond it, and led them into a long, high room, with desks and forms placed against the walls, and a writing table, and line of brown-stained tables down the middle. Opposite the windows there was a curious structure of shelves partitioned into lockers, and filled with rows of shabby school-books.

The room had been originally intended for a drawing-room, as was evident from the inevitable white and gold wall-paper and the tarnished gilt beading round the doors and window shutters; the mantel-piece, too, was of white marble, and the gaselier fitted with dingy crystal lusters.

But sad-colored maps hung on the ink-splashed walls, and a clock with a blank idiotic face (it is not every clock that possesses a decently intelligent expression) ticked over the gilt pier-glass. The boards were uncarpeted, and stained with patches of ink of all sizes and ages; while the atmosphere, in spite of the blazing fire, had a scholastic blending of soap and water, ink, and slate-pencil in its composition, which produced a chill and depressing effect.

On the forms opposite the fire some ten or twelve boys were sitting, a few comparing notes as to their holiday experiences with some approach to vivacity. The rest with hands in pockets and feet stretched toward the blaze, seemed lost in melancholy abstraction.

"There!" said Mrs. Grimstone, cheerfully, "you'll have plenty to talk to one another about. I'll send Tom in to see you presently!" And she left them with a reassuring nod, though the prospect of Tom's company did not perhaps elate them as much as it was intended to do.

Mr. Bultitude felt much as if he had suddenly been dropped

down a bear-pit, and, avoiding welcome and observation as well as he could, got away into a corner, from which he observed his new companions with uneasy apprehension.

"I say," said one boy, resuming the interrupted conversation, "did you go to Drury Lane? Wasn't it stunning! That goose, you know, and the lion in the forest, and all the wooden animals lumbering in out of the toy Noah's Ark!"

"Why couldn't you come to our party on Twelfth-night?" asked another. "We had great larks. I wish you'd been there!"

"I had to go to young Skidmore's instead," said a pale, spiteful-looking boy, with fair hair carefully parted in the middle. "It was like his cheek to ask me, but I thought I'd go, you know, just to see what it was like."

"What was it like?" asked one or two near him, languidly.

"Oh, awfully slow! They've a poky little house in Brompton somewhere, and there was no dancing, only boshy games and a conjurer, without any presents. And, oh! I say, at supper there was a big cake on the table, and no one was allowed to cut it, because it was hired. They're so poor, you know. Skidmore's pater is only a clerk, and you should see his sisters!"

"Why, are they pretty?"

"Pretty! they're just like young Skidmore—only uglier; and just fancy, his mother asked me, 'if I was Skidmore's favorite companion, and if he helped me in my studies?'"

The unfortunate Skidmore, when he returned, soon found reason to regret his rash hospitality, for he never heard the last of the cake (which had, as it happened, been paid for in the usual manner) during the rest of the term.

There was a slight laugh at the enormity of Mrs. Skidmore's presumption, and then a long pause, after which some one asked suddenly, "Does any one know whether Chawner really has left this time?"

"I hope so," said a big, heavy boy, and his hope seemed echoed with a general fervor. "He's been going to leave every term for the last year, but I believe he really has done it this time. He wrote and told me he wasn't coming back."

"Thank goodness!" said several, with an evident relief, and some one was observing that they had had enough of the sneaking business, when a fly was heard to drive up, and the bell rang, whereupon every one abandoned his easy attitude, and seemed to brace himself up for a trying encounter.

"Look out—here's Grimstone!" they whispered under their breaths, as voices and footsteps were heard in the hall outside.

Presently the door of the schoolroom opened, and another boy entered the room. Dr. Grimstone, it appeared, had not

been the occupant of the fly, after all. The new-comer was a tall, narrow-shouldered, stooping fellow, with a sallow, unwholesome complexion, thin lips, and small, sunken brown eyes. His cheeks were creased with a dimpling subsmile, half uneasy, half malicious, and his tread was mincing and catlike.

"Well, you fellows?" he said.

All rose at once, and shook hands effusively. "Why, Chawner!" they cried, "how are you, old fellow? We thought you weren't coming back!"

There was a heartiness in their manner somewhat at variance with their recent expressions of opinion; but they had doubtless excellent reasons for any inconsistency.

"Well," said Chawner, in a low, soft voice, which had a suggestion of feminine spitefulness, "I was going to leave, but I thought you'd be getting into mischief here without me to watch over you. Appleton, and Lench, and Coker want looking after badly, I know. So, you see, I've come back after all."

He laughed with a little malevolent cackle as he spoke, and the three boys named laughed too, though with no great heartiness, and shifting the while uneasily on their seats.

After this sally the conversation languished until Tom Grimstone's appearance. He strolled in with a semi-professional air, and shook hands with affability.

Tom was a short, flabby, sandy-haired youth, not particularly loved of his comrades, and his first remark was, "I say, you chaps, have you done your holiday task? Pa says he shall keep every one in who hasn't. I've done mine;" which, as a contribution to the general liveliness, was a distinct failure.

Needless to say, the work imposed as a holiday occupation had been first deferred, then forgotten, then remembered too late, and recklessly defied with the confidence begotten in a home atmosphere.

Amid a general silence Chawner happened to see Mr. Bultitude in his corner, and crossed over to him. "Why, there's Dicky Bultitude there all the time, and he never came to shake hands! Aren't you going to speak to me?"

Paul growled something indistinctly, feeling strangely uncomfortable and confused.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Chawner. "Does any one know? Has he lost his tongue?"

"He hadn't lost it coming down in the train," said Coker; "I wish he had. I tell you what, you fellows—— He—here's Grim at last! I'll tell you all about it up in the bedroom."

And Dr. Grimstone really did arrive at this point, much to Paul's relief, and looked in to give a grip of the hand and a few words to those of the boys he had not seen.

Biddlecomb, Tipping, and the rest, came in with him, and

the schoolroom soon filled with others arriving by later trains, among the later comers being the two house-masters, Mr. Blinkhorn and Mr. Tinkler; and there followed a season of bustle and conversation, which lasted until the doctor touched a small hand-bell, and ordered them to sit down round the tables while supper was brought in.

Mr. Bultitude was not sorry to hear the word "supper." He was faint and dispirited, and, although he had dined not very long since, thought that perhaps a little cold beef and beer, or some warmed-up trifle, might give him courage to tell his misfortunes before bedtime.

Of one thing he felt certain. Nothing should induce him to trust his person in a bedroom with any of those violent and vindictive boys; whether he succeeded in declaring himself that night or not, he would at least insist on a separate bedroom. Meantime he looked forward to supper as likely to restore geniality and confidence.

But the supper announced so imposingly proved to consist of nothing more than two plates piled with small pieces of thinly-buttered bread, which a page handed round together with tumblers of water; and Paul, in his disappointment, refused this refreshment with more firmness than politeness, as Dr. Grimstone observed.

"You got into trouble last term, Bultitude," he said. sternly, "on account of this same fastidious daintiness. Your excellent father has informed me of your waste and gluttony at his own bountifully spread table. Don't let me have accasion to reprove you for this again."

Mr. Bultitude, feeling the necessity of propitiating him, hastened to take the two largest squares of bread and butter on the plate. They were moist and thick, and he had considerable difficulty in disposing of them, besides the gratification of hearing himself described as a "pig" by his neighbors, who reproved him with a refreshing candor.

"I must get away from here," he thought, ruefully. "Dick seems very unpopular. I wish I didn't feel so low-spirited and unwell. Why can't I carry it off easily, as—as a kind of joke? How hard these forms are, and how those infernal boys did jog my back!"

Bedtime came at length. The boys filed, one by one, out of the room, and the doctor stood by the door to shake hands with them as they passed.

Mr. Bultitude lingered until the others had gone, for he had made up his mind to seize this opportunity to open the doctor's eyes to the mistake he was making. But he felt unaccountably nervous; the diplomatic and well chosen introduction he had carefully prepared had left him at the critical moment; all power

of thought was gone with it, and he went tremblingly up to the school-master, feeling hopelessly at the mercy of anything that chose to come out of his mouth.

"Dr. Grimstone," he began; "before retiring I—I must insist—I mean I must request—— What I wish to say is——"

"I see," said the doctor, catching him up sharply. "You wish to apologize for your extraordinary behavior in the railway carriage? Well, though you made some amends afterward, an apology is very right and proper. Say no more about it."

"It's not that," said Paul hopelessly; "I wanted to explain——"

"Your conduct with regard to the bread and butter. If it was simply want of appetite, of course there is no more to be said. But I have an abhorrence of——"

"Quite right," said Paul, recovering himself. "I hate waste myself, but there is something I must tell you before——"

"If it concerns that disgraceful conduct of Coker's," said the doctor, "you may speak on. I shall have to consider his case to-morrow. Has any similar case of disobedience come to your knowledge ? If so, I expect you to disclose it to me. You have found some other boy with sweatmeats in his possession?"

"Good heavens, sir!" said Mr. Bultitude, losing his temper; "I haven't been searching the whole school for sweetmeats! I have other things to occupy my mind, sir. And, once for all, I demand to be heard! Dr. Grimstone, there are—ahem! domestic secrets that can only be alluded to in the strictest privacy. I see that one of your assistants is writing at his table there. Can not we go where there will be less risk of interruption? You have a study, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," said the doctor, with terrible grimness, "I have a study—and I have a cane! I can convince you of both facts, if you wish it. If you insult me again by this brazen buffoonery, I will. Be off to your dormitory, sir, before you provoke me to punish you. Not another word! Go!"

And, incredible as it may appear to all who have never been in his position, Mr. Bultitude went. It was almost an abdication, it was treachery to his true self; he knew the vital importance of firmness at this crisis. But, nevertheless, his courage gave way all at once, and he crawled up the bare, uncarpeted stairs without any further protest.

"Good-night, Master Bultitude," said a housemaid, meeting him on the staircase; "you know your bedroom—No. 6, with Master Coker, and Master Biddlecomb, and the others."

Paul dragged himself up to the highest landing-stage, and, with a sick foreboding, opened the door on which the figure 6 was painted.

It was a large, bare, plainly-papered room, with several cur-

tainless windows, the blinds of which were drawn, a long, deal stand of wash-hand basins, and eight little white beds against the walls.

A fire was lighted in consideration of its being the first night, and several boys were talking excitedly round it.

"Here he is! He's stayed behind to tell more tales!" they cried, as Paul entered nervously. "Now then, Bultitude, what have you got to say for yourself?"

Mr. Bultitude felt powerless among all these young wolves. He had no knowledge of boys, nor any notion of acquiring an influence over them, having hitherto regarded them as necessary nuisances, to be rather repressed than studied. He could only stare hopelessly at them in fascinated silence.

"You see he hasn't a word to say for himself!" said Tipping. "Look here, what shall we do to him? Shall we try tossing in a blanket? I've never tried tossing a fellow in one myself, but as long as you don't jerk him too high, or out on the floor, you can't hurt him dangerously."

"No, I say, don't toss him in a blanket," pleaded Biddlecomb, and Paul felt gratefully toward him at the words; "any one coming up would see what was going on. I vote we flick at him with towels."

"Now just you understand this clearly," said Paul, thinking, not without reason, that this course of treatment was likely to prove painful; "I refuse to allow myself to be flicked at with towels. No one has ever offered me such an indignity in my life! Oh! do you think I've not enough on my mind as it is without the barbarities of a set of young brutes like you?"

As this appeal was not of a very conciliatory nature, they at once proceeded to form a circle round him and, judging their distance with great accuracy, jerked towels at his person with such diabolical dexterity that the wet corners cut him at all points like so many fine thongs, and he spun round like a top, dancing and, I regret to add, swearing violently at the pain.

When he was worked up almost to frenzy pitch, Biddlecomb's sweet low voice cried:

"*Cave*, you fellows! I hear Grim. Let him undress now, and we can lam it into him afterward with slippers!"

At this they all cast off such of their clothes as they still wore, and slipped modestly and peacefully into bed just as Dr. Grimstone's large form appeared at the doorway. Mr. Bultitude made as much haste as he could, but did not escape a reprimand from the doctor as he turned the gas out; and, as soon as he had made the round of the bedrooms and his heavy tread had died away down the staircase, the light-hearted occupants of No. 6 "lammed" it into the unhappy Paul until they were tired of

the exercise, and left him to creep, sore and trembling with rage and fright, into his cold, hard bed.

Then, after a little desultory conversation, one by one sank from incoherence into silence, and rose from silence to snores, while Paul alone lay sleepless, listening to the creeping tinkle of the dying fire, drearily wondering at the marvelous change that had come over his life and fortunes in the last few hours, and feverishly composing impassioned appeals which were to touch the doctor's heart and convince his reason.

CHAPTER V.

DISGRACE.

"Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning's face."

Sleep came at last, and brought, too, brief forgetfulness. It was not till the dull gray light of morning was glimmering through the blinds that Mr. Bultitude awoke to his troubles.

The room was bitterly cold, and he remained shivering in bed for some time, trying to realize and prepare for his altered condition.

He was the only one awake. Now and then from one of the beds around a boy would be heard talking in his sleep, or laughing with holiday glee—at the drolleries possibly of some pantomime performed for his amusement in the Theater Royal, Dreamland—a theater mercifully open to all boys free of charge, long after the holidays have come to an end, the only drawbacks being a certain want of definiteness in the plot and scenery, and a liability to premature termination of the vaguely splendid performance.

Once Kiffin, the new boy, awoke with a start and a heavy sigh, but he cried himself to sleep again almost immediately.

Mr. Bultitude could bear being inactive no longer. He thought, if he got up, he might perhaps see his misfortunes shrink to a more bearable, less hopeless scale, and besides, he judged it prudent, for many reasons, to finish his toilet before the sleepers began theirs.

Very stealthily, dreading to rouse any one and attract attention in the form of slippers, he broke the clinking crust of ice in one of the basins, and, shuddering from the shock, bathed

face and hands in the biting water. He parted his hair, which from natural causes he had been unable to accomplish for some years, and now found an awkwardness in accomplishing neatly, and then stole down the dark, creaking staircase just as the butler in the hall began to swing the big railway bell which was to din stern reality into the sleepy ears above.

In the schoolroom a yawning maid had just lighted the fire, from which turbid yellow clouds of sulphurous smoke were pouring into the room, making it necessary to open the windows and lower a temperature that was far from high originally.

Paul stood shaking by the mantel-piece in a very bad temper for some minutes. If the doctor had come in then, he might have been spurred by indignation to utter his woes, and even claim and obtain his freedom. But that was not to be.

The door did open presently, however, and a little girl appeared; a very charming little maiden indeed, in a neat, dark costume relieved by a fresh white pinafore. She had deep gray eyes and glossy brown hair falling over her forehead and down her back in soft straight masses, her face was oval rather than round, and slightly serious, though her smile was pretty and gay.

She ran toward Mr. Bultitude with a glad little cry, stretching out her pretty hands.

"Dick! dear Dick!" she said, "I am so glad! I thought you'd be down early, as you used to be. I wanted to sit up last night so very much, but mamma wouldn't let me."

Some old gentlemen might have been very glad to be welcomed in this way, even vicariously, and have seized the opportunity to pet and pay court to her. As for boys, it must have been a very bad school indeed which Dulcie Grimstone could not have robbed of much of its terrors.

Mr. Bultitude, however, as has been explained, did not appreciate children—being a family man himself. When one sees their petty squabbles and jealousies, hears their cruel din, and pays for their monkeyish mischief, perhaps the daintiest children seem but an earthly order of cherubim. He was only annoyed and embarrassed by the interruption, though he endured it.

"Ah," he said, with condescension, "and so you're Dr. Grimstone's little girl, are you? How d'ye do, my dear?"

Dulcie stopped and looked at him, with drawn eyebrows, and her soft mouth quivering.

"What makes you talk like that?" she asked.

"How ought I to talk?" said Paul.

"You didn't talk like that before," said Dulcie, plaintively. "I—I thought perhaps you'd be glad to see me. You were once. And—and—when you went away last you asked me to—

to—kiss you, and I did, and I wish I hadn't. And you gave me a ginger lozenge with your name written on it in lead pencil, and I gave you a cough-lozenge with mine; and you said it was to show that you were my sweetheart and I was yours. But I suppose you've eaten the one I gave you?"

"This is dreadful!" thought Mr. Bultitude. "What shall I do now? The child evidently takes me for that little scoundrel Dick." "Tut-tut," he said aloud, "little girls like you are too young for such nonsense. You ought to think about—about your dolls, and—ah, your needlework—not sweethearts!"

"You say that now!" cried Dulcie indignantly. "You know I'm not a little girl, and I've left off playing with dolls—almost. Oh, Dick, don't be unkind! You haven't changed your mind, have you?"

"No," said Paul, dismally, "I've changed my body. But there—you wouldn't understand. Run away and play somewhere, like a good little girl!"

"I know what it is!" said Dulcie. "You've been out to parties, or somewhere, and seen some horrid girl—you like—better than me!"

"This is absurd, you know," said Mr. Bultitude. "You can't think how absurd it is! Now, you'll be a very foolish little girl if you cry. You're making a mistake. I'm not the Dick you used to know!"

"I know you're not!" sobbed Dulcie. "But oh, Dick, you will be. Promise me you will be!" And, to Paul's horror and alarm, she put her arms round his neck, and cried piteously on his shoulder.

"Good gracious!" he cried, "let me go. Don't do that, for heaven's sake! I can hear some one coming. If it's your father it will ruin me!"

But it was too late. Over her head he saw Tipping enter the room, and stand glaring at them menacingly. Dulcie saw him too, and sprang away to the window, where she tried to dry her eyes unperceived, and then ran past him with a hurried good-morning, and escaped, leaving Paul alone with the formidable Tipping.

There was an awkward silence at first, which Tipping broke by saying, "What have you been saying to make her cry, eh?"

"What's that to you, sir?" said Paul, trying to keep his voice firm.

"Why, it's just this to me," said Tipping, "that I've been spoons on Dulcie myself ever since I came, and she never would have a word to say to me. I never could think why, and now it turns out to be you! What do you mean by cutting me out like this? I heard her call you 'dear Dick.'"

"Don't be an ass, sir!" said Paul, angrily.

"Now, none of your cheek, you know!" said Tipping, edging up against him with a dangerous inclination to first jostle aggressively, and then maul his unconscious rival. "You just mind what I say. I'm not going to have Dulcie bothered by a young beggar in the second form; she deserves something better than that, anyway, and I tell you that if I once catch you talking to her in the way you did just now, or if I hear of her favoring you more than any other fellow, I'll give you the very best licking you ever had in your life. So look out!"

At this point the other boys began to straggle down and cluster round the fire, and Paul withdrew from the aggrieved Tipping, and looked drearily out of the window on the hard road and bare black trees outside.

"I must tell the doctor how I'm situated!" he thought; "and yet, directly I open my mouth, he threatens to flog me. If I stay here that little girl will be always trying to speak to me, and I shall be thrashed by the red-haired boy. If I could only manage to speak out after breakfast."

It was not without satisfaction that he remembered that he paid extra for "meat for breakfast" in his son's school-bills for he was beginning to look forward to meal-time with the natural desire of a young and healthy frame for nourishment.

At eight o'clock the doctor came in and announced breakfast, leading the way himself to what was known in the school as the "Dining Hall." It scarcely deserved so high-sounding a name, perhaps, being a long, low room on the basement floor, with a big fireplace, fitted with taps and baking ovens, which provoked the suspicion that it had begun existence as a back kitchen.

The doctor took his seat alone at a cross table forming the top of one of the two rows of tables, set with white cups and saucers, and plates well heaped with the square pieces of bread and butter, while Mrs. Grimstone, with Dulcie and Tom, sat at the foot of the same row, behind two ugly urns of dull block-tin.

But when Mr. Bultitude, more hungry than he had felt for years, found his place at one of the tables, he was disgusted to find upon his plate—not, as he had confidently expected, a couple of plump poached eggs, with their appetizing contrast of ruddy gold and silvery white, not a crisp and crackling sausage or a mottled omelette, not even the homely but luscious rasher, but a brace of chill, forbidding sardines, floating grim and headless in bilious green oil!

It was a fish he positively loathed, nor could it be reasonably expected that the confidence necessary for a declaration was to be begotten by so sepulchral a form of nutriment.

He roused himself, however, to swallow them, together with

some of the thin and tin-flavored coffee. But the meal as a whole was so different from the plentiful, well-cooked breakfasts he had sat down before for years, as a matter of course, that it made him feel extremely unwell.

No talking was allowed during the meal. The doctor now and then looked up from his dish of kidneys on toast (at which envious glances were occasionally cast) to address a casual remark to his wife across the long row of plates and cups, but, as a rule, the dull, champing sound of boys solemnly and steadily munching was all that broke the silence.

Toward the end, when the plates had been generally cleared, and the boys sat staring with the stolidity of repletion at one another across the tables, the junior house-master, Mr. Tinkler, made his appearance. He had lately left a small and little known college at Cambridge, where he had contrived, contrary to expectation, to evade the uncoveted wooden spoon by just two places, which enabled the doctor to announce himself as being "assisted by a graduate of the University of Cambridge who has taken honors in the Mathematical Tripos."

For the rest, he was a small, insignificant-looking person, who evidently disliked the notice his late appearance drew upon himself.

"Mr. Tinkler," said the doctor in his most awful voice, "if it were my custom to rebuke my assistants before the school (which it is not), I should feel forced to remind you that this tardiness in rising is a bad beginning of the day's work, and sets a bad example to those under your authority."

Mr. Tinkler made no articulate reply, but sat down with a crushed expression, and set himself to devour bread and butter with an energy which he hoped would divert attention from his blushes; and almost immediately the doctor looked at his watch, and said, "Now, boys, you have half-an-hour for 'chevy'—make the most of it. When you come in I shall have something to say to you all. Don't rise, Mr. Tinkler, unless you have quite finished."

Mr. Tinkler preferred leaving his breakfast to continuing it under the trying ordeal of his principal's inspection. So, hastily murmuring that he had "made an excellent breakfast" —which he had not—he followed the others, who clattered upstairs to put on their boots and go out into the playground.

It was noticeable that they did so without much of the enthusiasm which might be looked for from boys dismissed to their sports. But the fact was that this particular sport "chevy," commonly known as "prisoners' base," was by no means a popular amusement, being of a somewhat monotonous nature, and calling for no special skill on the part of the performers. Besides this, moreover, it had the additional disadvantage (which

would have been fatal to a far more fascinating diversion) of being in a great measure compulsory.

Football and cricket were of course reserved for half-holidays, and played in a neighboring field rented by the doctor, and in the playground he restricted them to "chevy," which he considered, rightly enough, both gave them abundant exercise and kept them out of mischief. Accordingly, if any adventurous spirit started a rival game, it was usually abandoned sooner or later in deference to suggestions from headquarters which were not intended to be disregarded.

This, though undoubtedly well meant, did not serve to stimulate their affection for the game, an excellent one in moderation, but one which, if played "by special desire" two or three hours a day for weeks in succession, is apt to lose its freshness and pall upon the youthful mind.

It was a bright morning. There had been a hard frost during the night, and the ground was hard, sparkling with rime and ringing to the foot. The air was keen and invigorating, and the bare, black branches of the trees were outlined clear and sharp against the pale, pure blue of the morning sky.

Just the weather for a long day's skating over the dark-green glassy ice, or a bracing tramp on country roads into cheery, red-roofed market towns. But now it had lost all power to charm. It was only depressing by the contrast between the boundless liberty suggested and the dull reality of a round of uninteresting work which was all it heralded.

So they lounged listlessly about, gravitating finally toward the end of the playground, where a deep furrow marked the line of the base. There was no attempt to play. They stood gossiping in knots, grumbling and stamping their feet to keep warm. By and by the day-boarders began to drop in one by one, several of them, from a want of tact in adapting themselves to the general tone, earning decided unpopularity at once by a cheerful briskness, and an undisguised satisfaction at having something definite to do once more.

If Mr. Tinkler, who had joined one of the groups, had not particularly distinguished himself at breakfast, he made ample amends now, and by the grandeur and manliness of his conversation succeeded in producing a decided impression upon some of the smaller boys.

"The bore of a place like this, you know," he was saying, with magnificent disdain, "is that a fellow can't have his pipe of a morning. I've been used to it, and so, of course, I miss it. If I chose to insist on it, Grimstone couldn't say anything; but with a lot of young fellows like you, you see, it wouldn't look well!"

It could hardly have looked worse than little Mr. Tinkler him-

self would have done, if he had ventured upon more than the mildest of cigarettes, for he was a poor but pertinacious smoker, and his love for the weed was chastened by wholesome fear. There, however, he was in no danger of betraying this, and, indeed, it would have been injudicious to admit it.

"Talking of smoking," he went on, w.th a soft chuckle, as at recollections of unspeakable devilry, "did I ever tell you chaps of a tremendous scrape I very nearly got into up at the 'Varsity? Well, you must know there's a foolish rule there against smoking in the streets. Not that that made any difference to some of us! Well, one night about nine, I was strolling down Petty Cury with two other men, smoking (Bosher of 'Pothouse,' and Peebles of 'Cats,' both pretty well known up there for general rowdiness, you know—dear old friends of mine!), and, just as we turned the corner, who should we see coming straight down on us but a proctor with his bull-dogs (not dogs, you know, but the strongest 'gyps' in college). Bosher said 'Let's cut it!' and he and Peebles bolted. (They were neither of them funks, of course, but they lost their heads.) I went calmly on, smoking my cigar as if nothing was the matter. That put the proctor in a bait, I can tell you! He came fuming up to me. 'What do you mean, sir,' says he, quite pale with anger (he was a great, bull-headed fellow, one of the strongest dons of his year, that's why they made him a proctor)—'what do you mean by breaking the University statutes in this way?' 'It is a fine evening,' said I (I was determined to keep cool). 'Do you mean to insult me?' said he. 'No, old boy,' said I, 'I don't; have a cigar?' He couldn't stand that, so he called up his bull-dogs. 'I give him in charge!' he screamed out. 'I'll have him sent down!' 'I'll send you down first,' said I, and I just gave him a push—I never meant to hurt the fellow—and over he went. I rolled over a bull-dog to keep him company, and, as the other fellow didn't want any more, and stood aside to let me pass, I finished my stroll and my cigar."

"Was the proctor hurt, sir?" inquired a small boy, with great respect.

"More frightened than hurt, I always said," said Mr. Tinkler, lightly, "but somehow he never would proctorize any more—it spoilt his nerve. He was a good deal chaffed about it, but, of course, no one ever knew I'd had anything to do with it!"

With such tales of Homeric exploit did Mr. Tinkler inculcate a spirit of discipline and respect for authority. But although he had, indeed, once encountered a proctor, and at night, he did himself great injustice by this version of the proceedings, which were, as a matter of fact, of a most peaceable and law-abiding character, and, though followed by a pecuniary transaction the next day in which six-and-eightpence changed

pockets, the proctors continued their duties much as before, while Mr. Tinkler's feelings toward them, which had ever been reverential in the extreme, were, if anything, intensified by the experience.

Upon this incident, however, he had gradually embroidered the above exciting episode, until he grew to believe at intervals that he really had been a devil of a fellow in his time, which, to do him justice, was far from the case.

He might have gone on still further to calumniate himself, and excite general envy and admiration thereby, if at that moment Dr. Grimstone had not happened to appear at the head of the cast-iron staircase that led down into the playground; whereupon Mr. Tinkler affected to be intensely interested in the game, which, as a kind of involuntary compliment to the principal, about this time was galvanized into a sort of vigor.

But the doctor, after frowning gloomily down upon them for a minute or so, suddenly called "All in!"

He had several ways of saying this. Sometimes he would do so in a half-regretful tone, as one himself obeying the call of duty; sometimes he would appear for some minutes, a benignant spectator, upon the balcony, and summon them to work at length with a lenient pity—for he was by no means a hard-hearted man; but at other times he would step sharply and suddenly out and shout the word of command with a grim and ominous expression. On these last occasions the school generally prepared itself for a rather formidable quarter of an hour.

This was the case now, and, as a further portent, Mr. Blinkhorn was observed to come down and, after a few words with Mr. Tinkler, withdraw with him through the school gate.

"He's sent them out for a walk," said Siggers, who was skilled in omens. "It's a row!"

Rows at Crichton House, although periodical, and therefore things to be forearmed against in some degree, were serious matters. Dr. Grimstone was a quick-tempered man, with a copious flow of words and a taste for indulging it. He was also strongly prejudiced against many breaches of discipline which others might have considered trifling, and whenever he had discovered any such breach he could not rest until by all the means in his power he had ascertained exactly how many were implicated in the offense, and to what extent.

His usual method of doing this was to summon the school formally together and deliver an elaborate harangue, during which he worked himself by degrees into such a state of indignation that his hearers were most of them terrified out of their senses, and very often conscience-stricken offenders would give themselves up as hopelessly detected and reveal transgressions altogether unsuspected by him—much as a net brings up fish of

all degrees of merit, or as heavy firing will raise drowned corpses to the surface.

Paul naturally knew nothing of this peculiarity; he had kept himself as usual apart from the others, and was now trying to compel himself to brave the terrors of an avowal at the first opportunity. He followed the others up the steps with an uneasy wonder whether, after all, he would not find himself ignominiously set down to learn lessons.

The boys filed into the schoolroom in solemn silence, and took their seats at the desks along the brown tables. The doctor was there before them, standing up with one elbow resting upon a reading-stand, and with a suggestion of coming thunder in his look and attitude that, combined with the oppressive silence, made some of the boys feel positively ill.

Presently he began. He said that, since they had come together again, he had made a discovery concerning one among them which, astounding as it was to him, and painful as he felt it to be compelled to make it known, concerned them all to be aware of.

Mr. Bultitude could scarcely believe his ears. His secret was discovered, then; the injury done him by Dick about to be repaired, and open restitution and apology offered him! It was not perhaps precisely delicate on the doctor's part to make so public an affair of it, but, so long as it ended well, he could afford to overlook that.

So he settled himself comfortably on a form with his back against a desk and his legs crossed, his expression indicating plainly that he knew what was coming, and, on the whole, approved of it.

"Ever since I have devoted myself to the cause of tuition," continued the doctor, "I have made it my object to provide boys under my roof with fare so abundant and so palatable that they should have no excuse for obtaining extraneous luxuries. I have presided myself at their meals, I have superintended their very sports with a fatherly eye——"

Here he paused, and fixed one or two of those nearest him with the fatherly eye in such a manner that they writhed with confusion.

"He's wandering from the point," thought Paul, a little puzzled.

"I have done all this on one understanding—that the robustness of your constitutions, acquired by the plain, simple, but abundant regimen of my table, shall not be tampered with by the indulgence in any of the pampering products of confectionery. They are absolutely and unconditionally prohibited—as every boy who hears me now knows perfectly well!

"And yet" (here he began gradually to relax his self-restraint

and lash himself into a frenzy of indignation), "what do I find? There are some natures so essentially base, so incapable of being affected by kindness, so dead to honor and generosity, that they will not scruple to conspire or set themselves individually to escape and baffle the wise precautions undertaken for their benefit. I will not name the dastards at present—they themselves can look into their hearts and see their guilt reflected there——"

At this every boy, beginning to see the tendency of his denunciations, tried hard to assume an air of conscious innocence and grieved interest, the majority achieving conspicuous failure.

"I do not like to think," said Dr. Grimstone, "that the evil has a wider existence than I yet know of. It may be so; nothing will surprise me now. There may be some before me trembling with the consciousness of secret guilt. If so, let those boys make the only reparation in their power, and give themselves up in an honorable and straightforward manner!"

To this invitation, which indeed resembled that of the duck-destroying Mrs. Bond, no one made any response. They had grown too wary, and now preferred to play a waiting game.

"Then let the being—for I will not call him boy—who is known to me, step forth and confess his fault publicly, and sue for pardon!" thundered the doctor, now warmed to his theme.

But the being declined from a feeling of modesty, and a faint hope that somebody else might, after all, be the person aimed at.

"Then I name him!" stormed Dr. Grimstone; "Cornelius Coggs—stand up!"

Coggs half rose in a limp manner, whimpering feebly, "Me, sir? Oh, please, sir—no, not me, sir!"

"Yes, you, sir, and let your companions regard you with the contempt and abhorrence you so richly merit!" Here, needless to say, the whole school glared at poor Coggs with as much virtuous indignation as they could summon up at such short notice; for contempt is very infectious when communicated from high quarters.

"So, Coggs," said the doctor, with a slow and withering scorn, "so you thought to defy me; to smuggle compressed illness and concentrated unhealthiness into this school with impunity? You flattered yourself that, after I had once confiscated your contraband poisons, you would hear no more of it! You deceived yourself, sir! I tell you, once for all, that I will not allow you to contaminate your innocent schoolmates with your gifts of surreptitious sweetmeats; they shall not be perverted with your pernicious peppermints, sir; you shall not deprave them by the subtle and insidious jujube, or by the cheap but cloying Turkish Delight! I will not expose myself or them to the inroads of disease invited here by a hypocritical inmate of my walls! The traitor shall have his reward!"

All of which simply meant that the doctor, having once had a small boy taken seriously ill from the effects of over-eating himself, was naturally anxious to avoid such an inconvenience for the future. "Thanks to the fearless honesty of a youth," continued the doctor, "who, in an eccentric manner certainly, but with, I do not doubt, the best of motives, opened my eyes to the fell evil, I am enabled to cope with it at its birth. Richard Bultitude, I take this occasion of publicly thanking and commending you; your conduct was noble!"

Mr. Bultitude was too angry and disappointed to speak. He had thought his path was going to be made smooth, and now all this ridiculous fuss was being made about a few peppermint lozenges. He wished he had never mentioned them. It was not the last time he breathed that wish.

"As for you, Coggs," said the doctor, suddenly producing a little brown cane, "I shall make a public example of you."

Coggs stared idiotically and protested, but after a short and painful scene was sent off up to his bedroom, yelping like a kicked puppy.

"One word more," said the doctor, now almost calm again. "I know that you all think with me in your horror of the treachery I have just exposed. I know that you would scorn to participate in it." (A thrill and murmur, expressive of intense horror and scorn, went round the benches.) "You are anxious to prove that you do so beyond a doubt." (Again a murmur of assent.) "I give you all that opportunity. I have implicit trust and confidence in you—let every boarder go down into the box-room and fetch up his playbox, just as it is, and open it here before me."

There was a general fall of jaws at this very unexpected conclusion; but, contriving to overcome their dismay, they went outside and down through the play-ground into the box-room, Paul among the rest, and, amid universal confusion, every one opened his box, and, with a consideration especially laudable in heedless boyhood, thoughtfully and carefully removed from it all such dainties as might be calculated to shock or pain their preceptor.

Mr. Bultitude found a key which was labeled "play-box," and began to open a box which bore Dick's initials cut upon the lid; without any apprehensions, however, for he had given too strict orders to his daughter to fear that any luxuries would be concealed there.

But no sooner had he raised the lid than he staggered back with disgust. It was crammed with cakes, butter-scotch, hard-bake, pots of jam, and even a bottle of ginger wine—enough to compromise a chameleon!

He set himself to pitch them all out as soon as possible with feverish haste, but Tipping was too quick for him.

"Hallo!" he cried; "oh, I say, you fellows, come here! Just look at this! Here's this impudent young beggar, who sneaked of poor old Coggs for sucking jujubes, and very nearly got us all into a jolly good row, with his own box full all the time; butter-scotch, if you please, and jam, and ginger wine! You'll just put 'em all back again, will you, you young humbug!"

"Do you use those words to me, sir?" said Paul, angrily, for he did not like to be called a humbug.

"Yes, sir—please, sir," jeered Tipping; "I *did* venture to take such a liberty, sir."

"Then it was like your infernal impudence," growled Paul. "You be kind enough to leave my affairs alone. Upon my word, what are boys coming to nowadays!"

"Are you going to put that tuck back?" said Tipping, impatiently.

"No, sir, I'm not. Don't interfere with what you're not expected to understand!"

"Well, if you won't," said Tipping, easily, "I suppose we must. Biddlecomb, kindly knock him down, and sit on his head while I fill his playbox for him."

This was neatly and quickly done. Biddlecomb tripped Mr. Bultitude up, and sat firmly on him, while Tipping carefully replaced the good things in Dick's box, after which he locked it, and courteously returned the key. "As the box is heavy," he said, with a wicked wink, "I'll carry it up for you myself," which he did, Paul following, more dead than alive, and too shaken even to expostulate.

"Bultitude's box was rather too heavy for him, sir," he explained as he came in; and Dr. Grimstone, who had quite recovered his equanimity, smiled indulgently, and remarked that he "liked to see the strong assisting the weak."

All the boxes had by this time been brought up, and were ranged upon the tables, while the doctor went round, making an almost formal inspection, like a Custom House officer searching compatriots, and becoming milder and milder as box after box opened to reveal a fair and innocent interior.

Paul's turn was coming very near, and his heart seemed to shrivel like a burst bladder. He fumbled with his key, and tried to lose it. It was terrible to have one's self to apply the match which is to blow one to the winds. If—if—the idea was almost too horrible—but if he, a blameless and respectable city merchant, were actually to find himself served like the miserable Coggs!

At last the doctor actually stood by him. "Well, my boy,"

he said, not unkindly, "I'm not afraid of anything wrong here, at any rate."

Mr. Bultitude, who had the best reasons for not sharing his confidence, made some inarticulate sounds, and pretended to have a difficulty in turning the key.

"Eh? Come, open the box," said the doctor, with an altered manner. "What are you fumbling at it for in this—this highly suspicious manner? I'll open it myself."

He took the key and opened the lid, when the cakes and wine stood revealed in all their damning profusion. The doctor stepped back dramatically. "Hardbake!" he gasped; "wine, pots of strawberry jam! Oh, Bultitude, this is well—vastly well indeed! So I have nourished one more viper in my bosom, have I? A crawling reptile which curries favor by denouncing the very crime it conceals in its playbox! Oh, this is black duplicity! Bultitude, I was not prepared for this!"

"I—I swear I never put them in!" protested the unhappy Paul. "I—I never touch such things; they would bring on my gout in half an hour. It's ridiculous to punish me. I never knew they were there!"

"Then why were you so anxious to avoid opening the box?" rejoined the doctor. "No, sir, you're too ingenious; your guilt is clear. Go to the dormitory, and wait there till I come to you!"

Paul went upstairs, feeling utterly abandoned and helpless. Though a word as to his real character might have saved him, he could not have said it, and worse still, knew now that he could not.

"I shall be caned," he told himself, and the thought nearly drove him mad. "I know I shall be caned! What on earth shall I do?"

He opened the door of his bedroom. Coggs was rocking and moaning on his bed in one corner of the room, but looked up with red, furious eyes as Paul came in.

"What do you want up here?" he said savagely. "Go away, can't you?"

"I wish I could go away," said Paul dolefully; "but I'm—hum—I'm sent up here too," he explained, with some natural embarrassment.

"What!" cried Coggs, slipping off his bed and staring wildly; "you don't mean to say you're going to catch it too?"

"I've—ah—every reason to fear," said Mr. Bultitude stiffly, "that I am indeed going to 'catch it,' as you call it."

"Hooray!" shouted Coggs hysterically; "I don't care now. And I'll have some revenge on my own account as well. I don't mind an extra licking, and you're in for one as it is. Will you stand up to me or not?"

"I don't understand you," said Paul. "Don't come so near. Keep off, you young demon, will you?" he cried presently, as Coggs, exasperated by all his wrongs, was rushing at him with an evidently hostile intent. "There, don't be annoyed, my good boy," he pleaded, catching up a chair as a bulwark. "It was a misundertanding. I wish you no harm. There, my dear young friend! Don't!"

The "dear young friend" was grappling with him and attempting to wrest the chair away by brute force. "When I get at you," he said, his hot breath hissing through the chair rungs, "I'll give you the very warmest spanking you ever heard of!"

"Murder!" Paul gasped, feeling his hold on the chair relaxing. "Unless help comes, this young fiend will have my blood!"

They were revolving slowly round the chair, watching each other's eyes like gladiators, when Paul noticed a sudden blankness and fixity in his antagonist's expression, and, looking round, saw Dr. Grimstone's awful form framed in the doorway, and gave himself up for lost.

CHAPTER VI.

LEARNING AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

"I subscribe to Lucian: 'tis an elegant thing which cleareth up the mind, exerciseth the body, delights the spectators, which teacheth many comely gestures, equally affecting the ears, eyes, and soul itself."—*Burton, on Dancing.*

"What is this?" asked Dr. Grimstone, in his most blood-curling tone, after a most impressive pause at the dormitory door.

Mr. Bultitude held his tongue, but kept fast hold of his chair, which he held before him as a defense against either party, while Coggs remained motionless in the center of the room, with crooked knees and hands dangling impotently.

"Will one of you be good enough to explain how you come to be found struggling in this unseemly manner? I sent you up here to meditate on your past behavior."

"I should be most happy to meditate, sir," protested Paul, lowering his chair on discovering that there was no immediate danger, "if that—that bloodthirsty young ruffian there would

allow me to do so. I am going about in bodily fear of him, Dr. Grimstone. I want him bound over to keep the peace. I decline to be left alone with him—he's not safe!"

"Is that so, Coggs? Are you mean and base enough to take this cowardly revenge on a boy who has had the moral courage to expose your deceit—for your ultimate good—a boy who is unable to defend himself against you?"

"He can fight when he chooses, sir," said Coggs; "he blacked my eye last term, sir!"

"I assure you," said Paul, with the convincing earnestness of truth, "that I never blacked anybody's eye in the whole course of my life. I am not—ah—a pugnacious man. My age, and—hum—my position, ought to protect me from these scandals——"

"You've come back this year, sir," said Dr. Grimstone, "with a very odd way of talking of yourself—an exceedingly odd way. Unless I see you abandoning it and behaving like a reasonable boy again, I shall be forced to conclude you intend some disrespect and open defiance by it'"

"If you would allow me an opportunity of explaining my position, sir," said Paul, "I would undertake to clear your mind directly of such a monstrous idea. I am trying to assert my rights, Dr. Grimstone—my rights as a citizen, as a householder! This is no place for me, and I appeal to you to set me free. If you only knew one-tenth——"

"Let us understand one another, Bultitude," interrupted the doctor. "You may think it an excellent joke to talk nonsense to me like this. But let me tell you there is a point where a jest becomes an insult. I've spared you hitherto out of consideration for the feelings of your excellent father, who is so anxious that you should become an object of pride and credit to him; but, if you dare to treat me to any more of this bombast about 'explaining your rights,' you will force me to exercise one of mine—the right to inflict corporal punishment, sir—which you have just seen in operation upon another."

"Oh!" said Mr. Bultitude, faintly, feeling utterly crestfallen—and he could say nothing more.

"As for those illicit luxuries in your playbox," continued the doctor, "the fact that you brought the box up as it was is in your favor; and I am inclined, on reflection, to overlook the affair, if you can assure me that you were no party to their being put there."

"On the contrary," said Paul, "I gave the strictest orders that there was to be no such useless extravagance. I objected to have the kitchen and housekeeper's room ransacked to make a set of rascally boys ill for a fortnight at my expense!"

The doctor stared slightly at this creditable but unnatural

view of the subject. However, as he could not quarrel with the sentiment, he let the manner of expressing it pass unrebuked for the present; and after sentencing Coggs to two days' detention and the copying of innumerable French verbs, he sent the ill-matched pair down to the schoolroom to join their respective classes.

Paul went resignedly down stairs and into the room, where he found Mr. Blinkhorn at the head of one of the long tables, taking a class of about a dozen boys.

"Take your Livy and Latin Primer, Bultitude," said Mr. Blinkhorn, mildly, "and sit down."

Mr. Blinkhorn was a tall, angular man, with a long neck and slightly drooping head. He had thin, wiry brown hair, and a plain face, with shortsighted, kind brown eyes. In character he was mild and reserved, too conscientious to allow himself the luxury of either favorites or aversions among the boys, all of whom in his secret soul he probably disliked about equally, though he neither said nor did anything to show it.

Paul took a book—any book, for he did not know or care to know one from another—and sat down at the end farthest from the master, inwardly rebelling at having education thus forced upon him at his advanced years, but seeing no escape.

"At dinner time," he resolved, desperately, "I will insist on speaking out, but just now it is simply prudent to humor them."

The rest of the class drew away from him with marked coldness, and occasionally saluted him (when Mr. Blinkhorn's attention was called away) with terms and grimaces which Paul, although he failed to thoroughly understand them, felt instinctively were not intended as compliments.

Mr. Blinkhorn's notions of discipline were qualified by a gentleman's instinct, which forbade him to harass a boy already in trouble, as he understood young Bultitude had been, and so he forebore from pressing him to take any share in the class work.

Mr. Bultitude, therefore, was saved from any necessity of betraying his total ignorance of his author, and sat gloomily on the hard form, impatiently watching the minute-hand skulk round the mean, dull face of the clock above the chimney-piece, while around him one boy after another droned out a listless translation of the work before him, interrupted by mild corrections and comments from the master.

What a preposterous change from all his ordinary habits! At this very time, only twenty-four hours since, he was stepping majestically toward his accustomed omnibus, which was waiting with deference for him to overtake it; he was taking his seat, saluted respectfully by the conductor and cheerily by his fellow-passengers, as a man of recognized mark and position.

Now that omnibus would halt at the corner of Westbourne Terrace in vain, and go on its way Bankward without him. He was many miles away—in the very last place where any one would be likely to look for him, occupying the post of "whipping-boy" to his miserable son!

Was ever an inoffensive and respectable old gentleman placed in a more false and ridiculous position?

If he had only kept his drawer locked, and hidden the abominable Garudâ Stone away from Dick's prying eyes; if he had let the moralizing alone; if Boaler had not been so long fetching that cab, or if he had not happened to faint at the critical moment—what an immense difference any one of these apparent trifles would have made!

And now, what was he to do to get out of this incongruous and distasteful place? It was all very well to say that he had only to insist upon a hearing from the doctor; but what if, as he had very grave reason to fear, the doctor should absolutely refuse to listen, should even proceed to carry out his horrible threat? Must he remain there till the holidays came to release him? Suppose Dick—as he certainly would unless he was quite a fool—declined to receive him during the holidays? It was absolutely necessary to return home at once; every additional hour he passed in imprisonment made it harder to regain his lost self.

Now and then he roused himself from all these gloomy thoughts to observe his companions. The boys at the upper end, near Blinkhorn, were fairly attentive, and he noticed one small, snug-faced boy, about half way up, who, while a classmate was faltering and blundering over some question, would stretch out a snapping finger and thumb, and cry, "I know, sir. Let me tell him. Ask me, sir!" in a restless agony of superior information.

Down by Paul, however, the discipline was relaxed enough, as perhaps could only be expected on the first day of the term. One wild-eyed, long-haired boy had brought out a small china figure, with which, and the assistance of his right hand draped in a pocket-handkerchief, and wielding a pen holder, he was busy enacting a drama based on the lines of Punch and Judy, to the breathless amusement of his neighbors.

Mr. Bultitude might have hoped to escape notice by a policy of judicious self-effacement, but, unhappily, his long, blank, uninterested face was held by his companions to bear an implied reproach, and being delicately sensitive on these points they kicked his legs viciously, which made him extremely glad when dinner-time came, although he felt too faint and bilious to be tempted by anything but the lightest and daintiest luncheon.

But at dinner he found, with a shudder, that he was expected

to swallow a thick, ragged section of boiled mutton, which had been carved and helped so long before he sat down to it that the stagnant gravy was chilled and congealed into patches of greasy white.

He managed to swallow it, with many pauses of invincible disgust, only to find it replaced by a solid slab of pale-brown suet-pudding, sparsely bedewed with unctuous black treacle.

This, though a plentiful, and by no means unwholesome fare for growing boys, was not what he had been accustomed to, and, feeling far too heavy and unwell after it to venture upon an encounter with the doctor, he wandered slow and melancholy round the bare, graveled playground, during the half-hour after dinner devoted to the inevitable "chevy," until the doctor appeared at the head of the staircase.

It is always sad for the historian to have to record a departure from principle, and I have to confess with shame, on Mr. Bultitude's account, that, feeling the doctor's eye upon him, and striving to propitiate him, he humiliated himself so far as to run about with an elaborate affectation of zest, and his exertions were rewarded by hearing himself cordially encouraged to further efforts.

It cheered and emboldened him. "I've put him in a good temper," he told himself; "if I can only keep him in one till the evening, I really think I might be able to go up and tell him what a ridiculous mess I've got into. Why should I care, after all? At least I've done nothing to be ashamed of. It's an accident that might have happened to any man!"

It is a curious and unpleasant thing that, however reassuring and convincing the arguments may be with which we succeed in bracing ourselves to meet or disregard unpleasantness, the force of those arguments seldom or never outlasts the frame of mind in which they are composed, and, when the unpleasantness is at hand, there we are, just as unreasonably alarmed at it as ever.

Mr. Bultitude's confidence faded away almost as soon as he found himself in the schoolroom again. He found himself assigned to a class at one end of the room, where Mr. Tinkler presently introduced a new rule in Algebra to them, in such a manner as to procure for it a lasting unpopularity with all those who were not too much engaged in drawing duels and railway trains upon their slates to attend.

Although Paul did not draw upon his slate, his utter ignorance of Algebra prevented him from being much edified by the cabalistic signs on the blackboard, which Mr. Tinkler seemed to chalk up dubiously, and rub out again as soon as possible, with an air of being ashamed of them. So he tried to nerve himself for the coming ordeal by furtively watching and studying the

doctor, who was taking a Xenophon class at the upper end of the room, and, being in fairly good humor, was combining instruction with amusement, in a manner peculiarly his own.

He stopped the construing occasionally, to illustrate some word or passage by an anecdote; he condescended to enliven the translation here and there by a familiar and colloquial paraphrase; he magnanimously refrained from pressing any obviously inconvenient questions, and his manner, generally, was marked by a geniality which was additionally piquant from its extreme uncertainty.

Mr. Bultitude could not help thinking it a rather ghastly form of gayety, but he hoped it might last.

Presently, however, some one brought him a long blue envelope on a tray. He read it, and a frown gathered on his face. The boy who was translating at the time went on again in his former slipshod manner (which had hitherto provoked only jovial criticism and correction) with complete self-complacency, but found himself sternly brought to book, and burdened by a heavy imposition, before he quite realized that his blunders had ceased to amuse.

Then began a season ot sore trial and tribulation for the class. The doctor suddenly withdrew the light of his countenance from them, and sunshine was succeded by blackest thunder-clouds. The wind was no longer tempered to the more closely shorn of the flock; the weakest vessels were put on unexpectedly at crucial passages, and, coming hopelessly to grief, were denounced as impostors and idlers, till half the class was dissolved in tears.

A few of tbe better grounded stood the fire, like a remnant of the Old Guard in the Peninsula. With faces pale from alarm, and trembling voices, but perfect accuracy, they answered all the doctor's searching inquiries after the paradigms of Greek verbs that seemed irregular to the verge of impropriety.

Paul saw it all with renewed misgiving. "If I were there," he thought, "I should have been run out and flogged long ago! How angry those stupid young idiots are making him! How can I go up and speak to him when he's like that? And yet I must. I'm sitting on dynamite as it is. The very first time they want me to answer any questions from some of their books, I shall be ruined! Why wasn't I better educated when I was a boy, or why didn't I make a better use of my opportunities! It will be a bitter thing if they thrash me for not knowing as much as Dick. Grimstone's coming this way now ; it's all over with me !"

The Greek class had managed to repel the enemy, with some loss to themselves, and the doctor now left his place for a moment, and came down toward the bench on which Paul sat trembling.

The storm, however, had passed over for the present, and he only said, with restored calmness, "Who were the boys who learned dancing last term?"

One or two of them said they had done so, and Dr. Grimstone continued: "Mr. Burdekin was unable to give you the last lesson of his course last term, and has arranged to take you to-day, as he will be in the neighborhood. So be off at once to Mrs. Grimstone and change your shoes. Bultitude, you learned last term, too. Go with the others."

Mr. Bultitude was too overcome by this unexpected attack to contradict it, though of course he was quite able to do so; but then, if he had, he must have explained all, and he felt strongly that just then was neither the time nor the place for particulars.

It would have been wiser, perhaps, it would certainly have brought matters to a crisis, if he could have forced himself to tell everything—the whole truth in all its outrageous improbability—but he could not.

Let those who feel inclined to blame him for lack of firmness, consider how difficult and delicate a business it must almost of necessity be for any one to declare openly, in the teeth of common sense and plain facts, that there has been a mistake, and, in point of fact, he is not his own son, but his own father.

"I suppose I must go," he thought. "I needn't dance. Haven't danced since I was a young man. But I can't afford to offend him just now."

And so he followed the rest into a sort of cloak-room, where the tall hats which the boys wore on Sundays were all kept on shelves in white bandboxes; and there his hair was brushed, his feet were thrust into very shiny patent leather shoes, and a pair of kid gloves were given out to him to put on.

The dancing lesson was to be held in the "Dining Hall," from which the savor of mutton had not altogether departed. When Paul came in he found the floor cleared and the tables and forms piled up on one side of the room.

Biddlecomb and Tipping and some of the smaller boys were there already, their gloves and shiny shoes giving them a feeling of ceremony and constraint which they tried to carry off by an uncouth parody of politeness.

Siggers was telling stories of the dances he had been to in town, and the fine girls, whose step had exactly suited his own, and Tipping was leaning gloomily against the wall, listening to something Chawner was whispering in his ear.

There was a rustle of dresses down the stairs outside, and two thin little girls, looking excessively proper and prim, came in with an elderly gentlewoman, who was their governess, and wore a *pince-nez*, to impart the necessary suggestion of a superior intellect. They were the Miss Mutlows, sisters of one of

the day-boarders, and attended the course by special favor as friends of Dulcie's, who followed them in with a little gleam of shy anticipation in her eyes.

The Miss Mutlows sat stiffly down on a form, one on each side of her governess, and all three stared solemnly at the boys, who began to blush vividly under the inspection, to unbutton and rebutton their gloves with great care, and to shift from leg to leg in an embarrassed manner.

Dulcie soon singled out poor Mr. Bultitude, who, mindful of Tipping's warning, was doing his very best to avoid her.

She ran straight to him, laid her hand on his arm, and looked into his face pleadingly. "Dick," she said, "you're not sulky still, are you?"

Mr. Bultitude had borne a good deal already, and, not being remarkably sweet-natured, he shook the little mittened hand away, half-petulant and half-alarmed. "I do wish you wouldn't do this sort of thing in public. You'll compromise me, you know!" he said, nervously.

Dulcie opened her gray eyes wide, and then a flush came into her cheeks, and she made a little disdainful upward movement of her chin.

"You didn't mind it once," she said. "I thought you might want to dance with me. You liked to last term. But I'm sure I don't care if you choose to be disagreeable. Go and dance with Mary Mutlow if you want to, though you did say she danced like a pair of compasses, and I shall tell her you said so, too. And you know you're not a good dancer yourself. Are you going to dance with Mary?"

Paul stamped. "I tell you I never dance," he said. "I can't dance any more than a lamp-post. You don't seem an ill-natured little girl, but why on earth can't you let me alone?"

Dulcie's eyes flashed. "You're a nasty sulky boy," she said, in an angry undertone (all the conversation had, of course, been carried on in whispers). "I'll never speak to you or look at you again. You're the most horrid boy in the school—and the ugliest!"

And she turned proudly away, though any one who looked might have seen the fire in her eyes extinguished as she did so. Perhaps Tipping did see it, for he scowled at them from his corner.

There was another sound outside, as of fiddle-strings being twanged by the finger, and, as the boys hastily formed up in two lines down the center of the room and the Miss Mutlows and Dulcie prepared themselves for the courtesy of state, there came in a little fat man, with mutton-chop whiskers and a white face, upon which was written an unalterable conviction that his manners and deportment were perfection itself.

The two rows of boys bent themselves stiffly from the back, and Mr. Burdekin returned the compliment by an inclusive and stately inclination.

"Good afternoon, madam. Young ladies, I trust I find you well. (The courtesy just a leetle lower, Miss Mutlow—the right foot less drawn back. Beautiful! Feet closer at the recovery. Perfect!) Young gentlemen, good evening. Take your usual places, please, all of you, for our preliminary exercises. Now, the *chassée* round the room. Will you lead off, please, Master Dummer; the hands just lightly touching the shoulders, the head thrown negligently back to balance the figure; the whole deportment easy, but not careless. Now, please!"

And, talking all the time with a metrical fluency, he scraped a little jig on the violin, while Dummer led off a procession which solemnly capered round the room in sundry stages of conscious awkwardness. Mr. Bultitude shuffled along somehow after the rest, with rebellion at his heart and a deep sense of degredation.

"If my clerks were to see me now!" he thought.

After some minutes of this, Mr. Burdekin stopped them and directed sets to be formed for "The Lancers."

"Master Bultitude," said Mr. Burdekin, "you will take Miss Mutlow, please."

"Thank you," said Paul, "but—ah—I don't dance."

"Nonsense, nonsense, sir, you are one of my most promising pupils. You mustn't tell me that. Not another word! Come, select your partners."

Paul had no option. He was paired off with the tall and rather angular young lady mentioned, while Dulcie looked on pouting, and snubbed Tipping, who humbly asked for the pleasure of dancing with her, by declaring that she meant to dance with Tom.

The dance began to a sort of rhythmical accompaniment by Mr. Burdekin, who intoned "Tops advance, retire and cross. Balance at corners. (Very nice, Miss Grimstone!) More '*abandon*,' Master Chawner! Lift the feet more from the floor. Not so high as that! Oh! dear me, that last figure over again. And slide the feet, oh, slide the feet! (Master Bultitude, you're leaving out all the steps!)"

Paul was dragged, unwilling but unresisting, through it all by his partner, who jerked and pushed him into his place without a word, being apparently under strict orders from the governess not on any account to speak to the boys.

After the dance, the couples promenaded in a stiff but stately manner round the room to a dirge-like march scraped upon the violin, the boys taking the parts of ladies jibbing away from their partners in a highly unlady-like fashion, and the boy bur-

dened with the companionship of the younger Miss Mutlow walking along in a very agony of bashfulness.

"I suppose," thought Paul, as he led the way with Miss Mary Mutlow, if Dick were ever to hear of this, he'd think it *funny*. Oh, if I ever get the upper hand of him again—— How much longer, I wonder, shall I have to play the fool to this infernal fiddle!"

But if this was bad, worse was to come.

There was another pause, in which Mr. Burdekin said blandly: "I wonder now if we have forgotten our Scotch hornpipe. Perhaps Master Bultitude will prove the contrary. If I remember right, he used to perform it with singular correctness. And, let me tell you, there are a great number of spurious hornpipe steps in circulation. Come, sir, oblige me by dancing it alone!"

This was the final straw. It was not to be supposed for one moment that Mr. Bultitude would lower his dignity in such a preposterous manner. Besides, he did not know how to dance the hornpipe.

So he said: "I shall do nothing of the sort. I've had quite enough of this—ah—tomfoolery!"

"That is a very impolite manner of declining, Master Bultitude; highly discourteous and unpolished. I must insist now—really, as a personal matter—upon your going through the sailor's hornpipe. Come, you won't make a scene, I'm sure. You'll oblige me, as a gentleman?"

"I tell you I can't!" said Mr. Bultitude, sullenly. "I never did such a thing in my life; it would be enough to kill me at my age!"

"This is untrue, sir. Do you mean to say you will not dance the hornpipe?"

"No," said Paul, "I'll be d——d if I do!"

There was, unfortunately, no possible doubt about the nature of the word used—he said it so very distinctly. The governess screamed and called her charges to her, Dulcie hid her face, and some of the boys tittered.

Mr. Burdekin turned pink. "After that disgraceful language, sir, in the presence of the fairer sex, I have no more to do with you. You will have the goodness to stand in the center of that form. Gentlemen, select your partners for the Highland schottische!"

Mr. Bultitude, by no means sorry to be freed from the irksome necessity of dancing with a heart ill-attuned for enjoyment, got up on the form and stood looking, sullenly enough, upon the proceedings. The governess glowered at him now and then as a monster of youthful depravity; the Miss Mutlows glanced up at him as they tripped past, with curiosity not un-

mixed with admiration, but Dulcie steadily avoided looking in his direction.

Paul was just congratulating himself upon his escape, when the door opened wide, and the doctor marched slowly and imposingly into the room.

He did this occasionally, partly to superintend matters, and partly as an encouraging mark of approbation. He looked round the class at first with benignant toleration, until his glance took in the bench upon which Mr. Bultitude was set up. Then his eye slowly traveled up to the level of Paul's head, his expression changing meanwhile to a petrifying glare.

It was not, as Paul instinctively felt, exactly the position in which a gentleman who wished to stand well with those in authority over him would prefer to be found. He felt his heart turn to water within him, and stared limp and helpless at the doctor.

There was an awful silence (Dr. Grimstone was addicted to awful silences; and, indeed, if seldom strictly "golden," silence may often be called "iron"), but at last he inquired: "And pray what may you be doing up there, sir?"

"Upon my soul I can't say," said Mr. Bultitude, feebly. "Ask that gentleman there with the fiddle—he knows."

Mr. Burdekin was a good-natured, easy-tempered little man, and had already forgotten the affront to his dignity. He was anxious not to get the boy into more trouble.

"Master Bultitude was a little inattentive and, I may say, wanting in respect, Dr. Grimstone," he said, putting it as mildly as he could with any accuracy; "so I ventured to place him there as a punishment."

"Quite right, Mr. Burdekin," said the doctor, "quite right. I am sorry that any boy of mine should have caused you to do so. You are again beginning your career of disorder and rebellion, are you, sir? Go up into the schoolroom at once, and write a dozen copies before tea-time! A very little more eccentricity and insubordination from you, Bultitude, and you will reap a full reward—a full reward, sir!"

So Mr. Bultitude was driven out of the dancing-class in dire disgrace, which would not have distressed him particularly—being only one more drop in his bitter cup—but that he recognized that now his hopes of approaching the doctor with his burden of woe were fallen like a card castle. They were fiddled and danced away for at least twenty-four hours—perhaps forever!

Bitterly did he brood over this as he slowly and laboriously copied out sundry vain repetitions of such axioms as, "Cultivate Habits of Courtesy and Self-control," and "True Happiness is to be sought in Contentment." He saw the prospect of a toler-

ably severe flogging growing more and more distinct, and felt that he could not present himself to his family with the consciousness of having suffered such an indelible disgrace. His family—what would become of them in his absence? Would he ever see his comfortable home in Bayswater again?

Tea-time came, and after it evening preparation, when Mr. Tinkler presided in a feeble and ineffective manner, perpetually suspecting that the faint sniggers he heard were indulged in at his own expense, and calling perfectly innocent victims to account for them.

Paul sat next to Jolland, and, in his desperate anxiety to avoid further unpleasantness, found himself, as he could not for his life have written a Latin or a German composition, reduced to copy down his neighbor's exercises. This Jolland (who had looked forward to an arrangement of a very opposite kind) nevertheless cheerfully allowed him to do, though he expressed doubts as to the wisdom of a servile imitation—more, perhaps, from prudence than conscientiousness.

Jolland, in the intervals of study, was deeply engaged in the production of a small illustrated work of fiction, which he was pleased to call "The Adventures of Ben Buterkin at School." It was in a great measure an autobiography, and the cuts depicting the hero's flagellations—which were frequent in the course of the narrative—were executed with much vigor and feeling.

He turned out a great number of these works in the course of the term, as well as faces in pen and ink with moving tongues and rolling eyes, and these he would present to a few favored friends with a secretive and self-depreciatory giggle.

Amid scenes and companions like these, Paul sat out the evening hours on his seat, which was just at the junction of two forms—an exquisitely uncomfortable position, as all who have tried hard it will acknowledge—until the time for going to bed came round again. He dreaded the hours of darkness, but there was no help for it; to protest would have been madness just then, and, once more, he was forced to pass a night under the roof of Crichton House.

It was even worse than the first, though this was greatly owing to his own obstinacy.

The boys, if less subdued, were in better temper than the evening before, and found it troublesome to keep up a feud when the first flush of resentment had died out. There was a general disposition to forget his departure from the code of schoolboy honor, and give him an opportunity of retrieving the past.

But he would not meet them half-way; his repeated repulses by the doctor, and all the difficulties that beset his return to freedom, had made him very sulky and snappish. He had not

patience or adaptability enough to respond to their advances, and only shrank from their rough good nature—which naturally checked the current of good feeling.

Then, when the lights were put out, some one demanded a story. Most of the bedrooms possessed a professional story-teller, and in one there was a young romancist who began a stirring history the very first night of the term, which always ran on until the night before the holidays, and, if his hearers were apt to yawn at the sixth week of it, he himself enjoyed and believed in it keenly from beginning to end.

Dick Bultitude had been a valued *raconteur*, it appeared, and his father found accordingly, to his disgust, that he was expected to amuse them with a story. When he clearly understood the idea, he rejected it with so savage a snarl that he soon found it necessary to retire under the bedclothes to escape the general indignation that followed.

Finding that he did not actively resent it (the real Dick would have had the occupant of the nearest bed out by the ears in a minute!), they profited by his prudence to come to his bedside, where they pillowed his weary head (with their own pillows) till the slight offered them was more than avenged.

After all, Mr. Bultitude, with the breath half beaten out of his body, lay writhing and spluttering on his hard, rough bed till long after silence had fallen over the adjoining beds, and the sleepy hum of talk in the other bedrooms had died away.

Then he, too, drifted off into wild and troubled dreams, which, at their maddest, were scattered into blankness by a sudden and violent shock, which jerked him, clutching and grasping at nothing, on to the cold, bare boards, where he rolled, shivering.

"An earthquake!" he thought, "an explosion . . . gas—or dynamite! He must go and call the children . . . Boaler . . . the plate!"

But the reality to which he woke was worse still. Tipping and Coker had been patiently pinching themselves to keep awake until their enemy should be soundly asleep, in order to enjoy the exquisite pleasure of letting down the mattress; and, too dazed and frightened even to swear, Paul gathered up his bedclothes and tried to draw them about him as well as he might, and seek sleep, which had lost its security.

The Garudâ Stone had done one grim and cruel piece of work at least in its time.

CHAPTER VII.

CUTTING THE KNOT.

"A Crowd is not Company; And Faces are but a Gallery of Pictures; And Talk but a *Tinckling Cymball*, where there is no *Love*."—*Bacon.*

Once more Mr. Bultitude rose betimes, dressed noiselessly, and stole down to the cold schoolroom, where one gas-jet was burning palely—for the morning was raw and foggy.

This time, however, he was not alone. Mr. Blinkhorn was sitting at his little table in the corner, correcting exercises, with his chilly hands cased in woolen mittens. He looked up as Paul came in, and nodded kindly.

Paul went straight to the fire, and stood staring into it with lack-luster eye, too apathetic even to be hopeless, for the work of enlightening the doctor seemed more terrible and impossible than ever, and he began to see that, if the only way of escape lay there, he had better make up his mind with what philosophy he could to adapt himself to his altered circumstances, and stay on for the rest of the term.

But the prospect was so doleful and so blank that he drew a heavy sigh as he thought of it. Mr. Blinkhorn heard it, and rose awkwardly from the rickety little writing-table, knocking over a little pile of marble-covered copy-books as he did so.

Then he crossed over to Paul, and laid a hand gently on his shoulder. "Look here," he said, "why don't you confide in me? Do you think I'm blind to what has happened to you? I can see the change in you, if others cannot. Why not trust me?"

Mr. Bultitude looked up into his face, which had an honest interest and kindliness in it, and his heart warmed with a faint hope. If this young man had been shrewd enough to guess at his unhappy secret, might he not be willing to intercede with the doctor for him? He looked good-natured—he would trust him.

"Do you mean to say really," he asked, with more cordiality than he had used for a long time, "that you—see—the—a—the difference?"

"I saw it almost directly," said Mr. Blinkhorn, with mild triumph.

"That's the most extraordinary thing," said Paul, "and yet it ought to be evident enough to be sure. But no, you can't have guessed the real state of things!"

"Listen, and stop me if I'm wrong. Within the last few days a great change has been at work within you. You are not the

idle, thoughtless, mischievous boy who left here for his holidays——"

"No," said Paul, "I'll swear I'm not!"

"There is no occasion for such strong expressions. But, at all events, you come back here an altogether different being. Am I right in saying so?"

"Perfectly," said Paul, overjoyed at being so thoroughly understood, "perfectly. You're a very intelligent young man, sir. Shake hands. Why, I shouldn't be surprised, after that, if you knew how it all happened."

"That, too," said Mr. Blinkhorn, smiling, "I can guess. It arose, I doubt not, in a wish?"

"Yes," cried Paul, "you've hit it again. You're a conjurer, sir, by Gad you are!"

"Don't say 'by Gad,' Bultitude; it's inconsistent. It began, I was saying, in a wish, half unconscious perhaps, to be something other than what you had been——"

"I was a fool," groaned Mr. Bultiude, "yes, that was the way it began!"

"Then insensibly the wish worked a gradual transformation in your nature (you are old enough to follow me?)"

"Old enough for him to follow *me!*" thought Paul: but he was too pleased to be annoyed. "Hardly gradual, I should say," he said aloud. "But go on, sir, pray go on. I see you know all about it."

"At first the other part of you struggled against the new feelings. You strove to forget them—you even tried to resume your old habits, your former way of life—but to no purpose; and when you came here you found no fellowship among your companions—— '

"Quite out of the question !" said Paul.

"Their pleasures give you no delight——"

"Not a bit !"

"They, on their side, perhaps misunderstood your lack of interest in their pursuits. They cannot see—how should they—that you have altered your mode of life, and when they catch the difference between you and the Richard Bultitude they knew, why, they are apt to resent it."

"They are," agreed Mr. Bultitude; "they resent it in a confounded disagreeable way, you know. Why, I assure you that only last night I was——"

"Hush," said Mr. Blinkhorn, holding up one hand; "complaints are unmanly. But I see you wonder at my knowing all this?"

"Well," said Paul, "I am rather surprised."

"What would you say if I told you I had undergone it myself in my time?"

"You don't mean to tell me there are two Garudâ Stones in this miserable world!" cried Paul, thoroughly astonished.

"I don't know what you mean now, but I can say with truth that I too have had my experiences—my trials. Months ago, from certain signs I noticed, I foresaw that this was coming upon you."

"Then," said Mr. Bultitude, "I think, in common decency, you might have warned me. A post-card would have done it. I should have been better prepared to meet this, then!"

"It would have been worse than useless to attempt to hurry on the crisis. It might have even prevented what I fondly hoped would come to pass."

"Fondly hoped!" said Paul; "upon my word you speak plainly, sir."

"Yes," said Mr. Blinkhorn. "You see I knew the Dick Bultitude that was, so well; he was frolicsome, impulsive, mischievous even, but under it all there lay a nature of sterling worth."

"Sterling worth!" cried Paul. "A scoundrel, I tell you, a heartless, selfish young scoundrel! Call things by their right names, if you please."

"No, no," said Mr. Blinkhorn, "this extreme self-depreciation is morbid, very morbid. There was no actual vice."

"No actual vice! Why, God bless my soul, do you call ingratitude—the basest, most unfilial, most treacherous ingratitude—no vice, sir? You may be a very excellent young man, but if you gloss over things in that fashion your moral sense must be perverted, sir—strangely perverted."

"There were faults on both sides, I fear," said Mr. Blinkhorn, growing a little scandalized by the boy's odd warmth of expression. "I have heard something of what you had to bear with. On the one hand, a father, undemonstrative, stern, easily provoked; on the other, a son, thoughtless, forgetful, and at times it may be even willful. But you are too sensitive; you think too much of what seems to me a not unnatural (although, of course, improper) protest against coldness and injustice. I should be the last to encourage a child against a parent, but, to comfort your self-reproach, I think it right to assure you that, in my judgment, the outburst you refer to was very excusable."

"Oh," said Paul, "you do? You call that comfort? Excusable! Why, what the deuce do you mean, sir? You're taking the other side now!"

"This is not the language of penitence, Bultitude," said poor Mr. Blinkhorn, disheartened and bewildered. "Remember, you have done with your old self now!"

"Don't say that," said Paul; "I don't believe it!"

"You want to be your old self again?" gasped Mr. Blinkhorn.

"Why, of course I do," said Paul, angrily; "I'm not an idiot!'

"You are weary of the struggle so soon?" said the other, with reproach.

"Weary? I tell you I'm sick of it! If I had only known what was in store for me before I had made such a fool of myself!"

"This is horrible!" said Mr. Blinkhorn—"I ought not to listen to you."

"But you must," urged Paul; "I tell you I can't stand it any longer. I'm not fit for it at my age. You must see that yourself, and you must make Grimstone see it too!"

"Never!" said Mr. Blinkhorn, firmly. "Nor do I see how that would help you. I will not let you go back in this deplorable way. You must nerve yourself to go on now in the path you have chosen; you must force your schoolfellows to love and respect you in your new character. Come, take courage! After all, in spite of your altered life, there is no reason why you should not be a frank and happy-hearted boy, you know."

"A frank and happy-hearted fiddle-stick!" cried Paul, rudely (he was so disgusted at the suggestion); "don't talk rubbish, sir! I thought you were going to show me some way out of all this, and, instead of that, knowing the shameful way I've been treated, you can stand there and calmly recommend me to stay on here and be happy-hearted and frank!"

"You must be calm, Bultitude, or I shall leave you. Listen to reason. You are here for your good. Youth, it has been beautifully said, is the springtime of life. Though you may not believe it, you will never be happier than you are now. Our schooldays are——"

But Mr. Bultitude could not tamely be mocked with the very platitudes that had brought him all his misery—he cut the master short in a violent passion.

"This is too much!" he cried. "You shall not palm off that miserable rubbish on me. I see through it. It's a plot to keep me here, and you're in it. It's false imprisonment, and I'll write to the *Times*. I'll expose the whole thing!"

"This violence is only ridiculous," said Mr. Blinkhorn. "If I were not too pained by it, I should feel it my duty to report your language to the doctor. As it is, you have bitterly disappointed me; I can't understand it at all. You seemed so subdued, so softened lately. But, until you come to me and say you regret this, I must decline to have anything more to say to you. Take your book and sit down in your place!"

And he went back to his exercises, looking puzzled and pained.

The fact was, he was an ardent believer in the Good Boy of a certain order of school tales—the boy who is seized with a sudden conviction of the intrinsic baseness of boyhood, and does all in his power to get rid of the harmful taint; the boy who renounces his old comrades and his natural tastes (which after all seldom have any serious harm in them), to don a panoply of priggishness which is too often kick-proof.

This kind of boy is rare enough at most English schools, but Mr. Blinkhorn had been educated at a large Nonconformist college, where "revivals" and "awakenings" were periodical, and undoubtedly did produce changes of character violent enough, but sadly short in duration.

He was always waiting for some such boy to come to him with his confession of moral worthlessness and vows of unnatural perfection, and was too simple and earnest and good himself to realize that such states of the youthful mind are not unfrequently merely morbid and hysterical, and too often degenerate into Pharisaism or, worse still, hypocrisy.

So when he noticed Mr. Bultitude's silence and depression, his studied withdrawal from the others and his evident want of sympathy with them, he believed he saw the symptoms of a conscience at work, and that he had found his reformed boy at last.

It was a very unfortunate misunderstanding, for it separated Paul from, perhaps, the only person who would have had the guilelessness to believe his incredible story, and the good nature to help him to find escape from his misfortunes.

Mr. Bultitude, on his part, was more angry and disgusted than ever. He began to see that there was a muddle somewhere, and that his identity was unsuspected still. The young man, for all his fair speaking and pretended shrewdness, was no conjurer after all. He was left to rely on his own resources, and he had begun to lose all confidence in their power to extricate him.

As he brooded over this, the boys straggled down as before, and looked over their lessons for the day in a dull, lifeless manner. The cold, unsatisfying breakfast and the half hour assigned to "chevy" followed in due course, and, after that, Paul found himself set down with a class to await the German master, Herr Stohwasser.

He had again tried to pull himself together and approach the doctor with his protest, but no sooner did he find himself near his presence than his heart began to leap wildly and then retired down toward his boots, leaving him hoarse, palpitating, and utterly blank of ideas.

It was no use—and he resigned himself for yet another day of unwelcome instruction.

The class was in a little room on the basement floor, with a linen-press taking up one side, some bare, white deal tables and forms, and, on the walls, a few colored German prints. They sat there talking and laughing, taking no notice of Mr. Bultitude, until the German made his appearance.

He was by no means a formidable person, though stout and tall. He wore big, round, owlish spectacles, and his pale, broad face and long nose, combined with a wild crop of light hair and a fierce beard, gave him almost as incongruous an appearance as if a sheep had looked out of a gun-port.

He took his place with an air of tremendous determination to enforce a hard morning's work on the book they were reading—a play of Schiller's, of the plot of which, it is needless to say, no one of his pupils had or cared to have the vaguest notion, having long since condemned the whole subject, with insular prejudice, as "rot."

"Now, please," said Herr Stohwasser, "where we left off last term. Third act, first scene—Court before Tell's house. Tell is with the carpenter axe, Hedwig with a domestic labor occupied. Walter and Wilhelm in the depth sport with a liddle gross-bow. Biddlegom, you begin. Walter (sings)."

But Biddlecomb was in a conversational mood, and willing to postpone the task of translation, so he merely inquired, with an air of extreme interest, how Herr Stohwasser's grammar was getting on.

This was a subject on which (as he perhaps knew) the German never could resist enlarging, for, in common with most German masters, he was giving birth to a new grammar, which, from the daring originality of its plans, and its extreme simplicity, was destined to supersede all other similar works.

"Ach," he said, "it is brogressing. I haf just gompleted a gomprehensive table of ze irregular virps, vith ze eggserzizes upon zem. And zere is further an appendeeks which in itself gontains a goncise view of all ze vort-plays possible in the Charman tong. But, come, let us gontinue vith our Tell!"

"What are vort-plays?" persisted Biddlecomb, insiduously, having no idea of continuing with his Tell just yet.

"A vort-play," explained Herr Stohwasser, "it is English, nicht so? A sporting vith vorts—a 'galembour'—a—Gott pless me, vat you call a 'pon.'"

"Like the one you made when you were a young man!" Jolland called out from the lower end of the table.

"Yes; tell us the one you made when you were a young man!" the class entreated, with flattering eagerness.

Herr Stohwasser began to laugh with slow, deep satisfaction; the satisfaction of a successful achievement.

"Hah, you remember dat!" he said; "ah, yes, I make him

when a young man; but, mind you, he was not a pon—he was a '*choke*' I haf told you all about him before."

"We've forgotten it," said Biddlecomb; "tell it us again."

As a matter of fact, this joke, in all its lights, was tolerably familiar to most of them by this time, but, either on its individual merits, or perhaps because it compared favorably with the sterner alternative of translating, it was periodically in request, and always met with evergreen appreciation.

Herr Stohwasser beamed with the pride of authorship. Like the celebrated Scotchman, he "jocked wi' deeficulty," and the outcome of so much labor was dear to him.

"I zent him into ze Charman 'Kladderadatch' (it is a paper like your 'Ponch'). It—mein choke—was upon ze Schleswig-Holstein gomplication; ze beginning was in this way——"

And he proceeded to set out in great length all the circumstances which had given materials for his "choke," with the successive processes by which he had shaped and perfected it, passing on to a recital of the masterpiece itself, and ending up by a philosophical analysis of the same, which must have placed his pupils in full possession of the point, for they laughed consumedly.

"I tell you zis," he said, "not to aggustom your minds vith frivolity and lightness, but as a lesson in ze gonstruction of ze langwitch. If you can choke in Charman, you vill also be able to gonverse in Charman."

"Did the German what's-its-name print your joke?" inquired Coggs.

"It has not appeared yet," Herr Stohwasser confessed; "it takes a long time to get an imbortant choke like that out in print. But I vait—I write to ze editor every veek—and I vait."

"Why don't you put it in your grammar?" suggested Tipping.

"I haf—ze greater part of it—(it vas a long choke, but I gompressed him). If I haf time, some day I will make anozer liddle choke to aggompany, begause I vant my Crammar to be a goot Crammar, you understandt. And now to our Tell. Really you people do noding but chatter!"

All this, of course, had no interest for Mr. Bultitude, but it left him free to pursue his own thoughts in peace, and indeed this lesson would never have been recorded here, but for two circumstances which will presently appear, both of which had no small effect on his fortunes.

He sat nearest the window, and looked out on the pinched and drooping laurels in the inclosure, which were damp with frost melting in the February sunshine, Over the wall he could see the tops of passing vehicles, the country carrier's cart, the

railway parcels van, the fly from the station. He envied even the drivers; their lot was happier than his!

His thoughts were busy with Dick. Oddly enough, it had scarcely occurred to him before to speculate on what he might be doing in his absence; he had thought chiefly about himself. But, now he gave his attention to the subject, what new horrors it opened up! What might not become of his well-conducted household under the rash rule of a foolish schoolboy? The office, too—who could say what mischief Dick might not be doing there, under the cover of his own respectable form?

Then it might seem good to him any day to smash the Garudâ stone, and after that there would be no hope of matters being ever set right again!

And yet, miserable coward and fool that he was, with everything depending upon his losing no time to escape, he could not screw up his courage, and say the words that were to set him free.

All at once—and this is one of the circumstances that make the German lesson an important stage in this story—an idea suggested itself to him quite dazzling by its daring and brilliancy.

Some may wonder, when they hear what it was, why he never thought of it before, and it is somewhat surprising, but by no means without precedent. Mark Twain has told us somewhere of a ferocious bandit who was confined for sixteen years in solitary captivity before the notion of escape ever occurred to him. When it did, he simply opened the window and got out.

Perhaps a similar passiveness on Mr. Bultitude's part was due to a very natural and proper desire to do everything without scandal, and in a legitimate manner; to march out, as it were, with the honors of war. Perhaps it was simple dullness. The fact remains that it was not till then that he saw a way of recovering his lost position without the disagreeable necessity of disclosing his position to any one at Crichton House.

He had still, thank Heaven, the five shillings he had given Dick. He had not thrown them away with the other articles in his mad passion. Five shillings was not much, but it was more than enough to pay for a third-class fare to town. He had only to watch his opportunity, slip away to the station, and be at home again, defying the usurper, before any one at Crichton House had discovered his absence.

He might go that very day, and the delight of this thought—the complete reaction from blank despair to hope—was so intense that he could not help rubbing his hands stealthily under the table, and chuckling with glee at his own readinesss of resource.

When we are most elated, however, there is always a counter-

acting agent at hand to bring us down again to our proper level, or below it. The Roman general in the triumph never really needed the slave in the chariot to dash his spirits—he had his friends there already; the guests at an Egyptian dinner must have brought their own skeletons.

There was a small, flaxen-haired little boy sitting next to Mr. Bultitude—seemingly a quiet, inoffensive being—who at this stage served to sober him by furnishing another complication.

"Oh, I say, Bultitude," he piped shrilly in Paul's ear, "I forgot all about it. Where's my rabbit?"

The unreasonable absurdity of such a question annoyed him excessively. "Is this a time," he said, reprovingly, "to talk of rabbits? Mind your book, sir."

"Oh, I daresay," grumbled little Porter, the boy in question; "it's all very well, but I want my rabbit."

"Hang it, sir," said Paul, angrily, "do you suppose I'm sitting on it?"

"You promised to bring me back a rabbit," persisted Porter, doggedly; "you know you did, and it's a beastly shame. I mean to have that rabbit, or know the reason why."

At the other end of the table Biddlecomb had dexterously allured Herr Stohwasser into the meshes of conversation; this time upon the question *(à propos des bottes)* of street performances. "I vill tell you a gurious thing," he was saying "vat happened to me ze ozer day, ven I was walking down ze Strandt. I saw a leedle, gommon dirty boy, with a tall round hat on him, and he stand in a side street right out in ze road, and he take off his tall round hat and he put it on ze grount, and he stand still and look so at it. So I stop too, to see vat he would do next. And presently he take out a large sheet of paper and tear it in four pieces very garefully, and stick zem round ze tall round hat, and put it on his head again, and zen he set it down on ze grount and look at it vonce more, and all ze time he never speak von vort. And I look and look and vonder vat he vould do next. And a great growd of peoples com, and zey look and vonder too. And zen all at once ze leedle dirty boy he take out all ze paper and put on ze hat, and he valk avay, laughing altogether foolishly at zomzing I did not understand at all. I haf been thinking efer since vat in de vorldt he do all zat nonsense for. And zere is von ozer gurious thing I see in your London streets zat very same day. Zere vas a poor house cat vat had been by a cab overrun as I passed by, and von man vith a kind varm heart valk up and stamp it on ze head for to end its pain. And anozer man vith anozer kind heart he gom up directly and had not seen ze cat overrun, but he see ze first man stamping, and he knocked him down for ill-treating animals; it vas quite gurious to see; till ze

policeman arrest zem both for fighting. Goggs, degline 'Katze,' and gif me ze berfect and bast barticiple of 'kampsen,' to fight." This last relapse into duty was caused by the sudden entrance of the doctor, who stood at the door looking on for some time with a general air of being intimately acquainted with Schiller as an author, before suggesting graciously that it was time to dismiss the class.

Wednesday was a half-holiday at Crichton House, and so, soon after dinner, Paul found himself marshaled with the rest in a procession bound for the football field. They marched two and two, Chawner and three of the other elder boys leading with the ball and four goal-posts ornamented with colored calico flags, and Mr. Blinkhorn and Mr. Tinkler bringing up the rear.

Mr. Bultitude was paired with Tom Grimstone, who, after eyeing him askance for some time, could control his curiosity no longer.

"I say, Dick," he began, "what's the matter with you this term?"

"My name is not Dick," said Paul, stiffly.

"Oh, if you're so particular then," said Tom; "but, without humbug, what is the matter?"

"You see a change, then," said Paul, "you do see a difference, eh?"

"Rather!" said Tom, expressively. "You've come back what I call a beastly sneak, you know, this term. The other fellows don't like it; they'll send you to Coventry unless you take care."

"I wish they would," said Paul.

"You don't talk like the same fellow, either," continued Tom; "you use such fine language, and you're always in a bait, and yet you don't stick up for yourself as you used to. Look here, tell me (we were always chums), is it one of your larks?"

"Larks!" said Paul, "I'm in a fine mood for larks. No, it's not one of my larks."

"Perhaps your old governor has been making a cad of himself, then, and you're out of sorts about it."

"I'll thank you not to speak about him in that way," said Paul, "in my presence."

"Why," grumbled Tom, "I'm sure you said enough about him yourself last term. It's my belief you're imitating him now."

"Ah," said Paul, "and what makes you think that?"

"Why, you go about strutting and swelling just like he did when he came about sending you here. I say, do you know what ma said about him after he went away?"

"No," said Paul, "your mother struck me as a very sensible and agreeable woman—if I may say so to her son."

"Well, ma said your governor seemed to leave you here

just like they leave umbrellas at picture galleries, and she believed he had a larged-sized money-bag inside him instead of a heart."

"Oh!" said Paul, with great disgust, for he had thought Mrs. Grimstone a woman of better taste; "your mother said that, did she? Vastly entertaining, to be sure—ha, ha! He would be pleased to know she thought that, I'm sure."

"Tell him, and see what he says," suggested Tom; "he is an awful brute to you, though, isn't he?"

"If," growled Mr. Bultitude, "slaving from morning till night to provide education and luxury for a thankless brood of unprofitable young vipers is 'being a brute,' I suppose he is."

"Why, you're sticking up for him now!" said Tom. "I thought he was so strict with you. Wouldn't let you have any fun at home, and never took you to pantomimes?"

"And why should he, sir, why should he? Tell me that. Tell me why a man is to be hunted out of his comfortable chair, after a well-earned dinner, to go and sit in a hot theater and a thorough draught, yawning at the miserable drivel managers choose to call a pantomime? Now, in my young days, there *were* pantomimes. I tell you, sir, I've seen——"

"Oh, if you're satisfied, I don't care!" said Tom, astonished at this apparent change of front. "If you choose to come back and play the corker like this, it's your lookout. Only, if you knew what Sproule major said about you just now——"

"I don't want to know," said Paul, "it doesn't concern me."

"Perhaps it doesn't concern you what pa thinks, either? Pa told ma last night that he was altogether at a loss to know how to deal with you, you had come back so queer and unruly. And he said, let me see, oh, he said that 'if he didn't see an alteration very soon he should resort to more drastic measures 'drastic measures is Latin for a whopping."

"Good gracious!" thought Paul. "I haven't a moment to lose; he might 'resort to drastic measures' this very evening. I can't change my nature at my time of life. I must run for it, soon."

Then he said aloud to Tom, "Can you tell me, my—my young friend, if, supposing a boy were to ask to leave the field—saying, for instance, that he was not well and thought he should be better at home—whether he would be allowed to go?"

"Of course he would," said Tom, "you ought to know that by this time. You've only to ask Blinkhorn or Tinkler; they'll let you go right enough."

Paul saw his course quite clearly now, and was overcome with

relief and gratitude. He wrung the astonished Tom's hand warmly; "Thank you," he said, briskly and cheerfully, "thank you. I'm really uncommonly obliged to you. You're a very intelligent boy. I should like to give you sixpence."

But, although Tom used no arguments to dissuade him, Mr. Bultitude remembered his position in time, and prudently refrained from such ill-judged generosity. Sixpences were of vital importance now, when he expected to be starting so soon on his perilous journey.

And so they reached the field where the game was to be played, and where Paul was resolved to have one desperate throw for liberty and home. He was more excited than anxious as he thought of it, and it certainly did seem as if all the chances were in his favor, and that fortune must have forsaken him, indeed, if anything were allowed to prevent his escape.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNBENDING THE BOW.

"I pray you give me leave to go from hence,
I am not well."—*Merchant of Venice.*

"He will not blush, that has a father's heart,
To take in childish plays a childish part;
But bends his sturdy back to any toy
That youth takes pleasure in—to please his boy."

The football field was a large one, bounded on two sides by tall wooden palings, and on the other two by a hedge and a new shingled road, separated from the field by a post and rails.

Two of the younger boys, proud of their office, raced down to the further end to set up the goal-posts. The rest lounged idly about without attempting to begin operations, except the new boy Kiffin, who was seen walking apart from the rest, diligently studying the "rules of the game of football," as laid down in a small "Boy's Own Pocket Book and Manual of Outdoor Sports," with which he had been careful to provide himself.

At last Tipping suggested that they had better begin, and proposed that Mr. Blinkhorn and himself should toss up for the choice of sides, and this being done, Mr. Bultitude presently, to his great dismay, heard his name mentioned. "I'll have young Bultitude," said Tipping; "he used to play up decently. Look

here, you young beggar, you're on my side, and if you don't play up it will be the worse for you."

It was not worth while, however, to protest, since he would so soon be rid of the whole crew forever, and so Paul followed Tipping and his train with dutiful submission, and the game began.

It was not a very spirited performance. Mr. Tinkler, who was not an athlete, retired at once to the post and rails, on which he settled himself to enjoy a railway novel with a highly stimulating cover. Mr. Blinkhorn, who had more conscientious views of his office, charged about vigorously, performing all kinds of wonders with the ball, though evidently more from a sense of duty than with any idea of enjoyment.

Tipping occasionally took the trouble to oppose him, but as a concession merely, and with a parade of being under no necessity to do so ; and these two, with a very small following of enthusiasts on either side, waged a private and confidential kind of warfare in different parts of the field, while the others made no pretence of playing for the present, but strolled about in knots, exchanging and bartering the treasures valuable in the sight of schoolboys, and gossiping generally.

As for Paul, he did not clearly understand what "playing up" might mean. He had not indulged in football since he was a genuine boy, and then only in a rudimentary and primitive form, and without any particular fondness for the exercise. But being now, in spirit at all events, a precise old gentleman, with a decided notion of taking care of himself, he was resolved that not even Tipping should compel him to trust his person within range of that dirty brown globe, which whistled past his ear or seemed spinning toward his stomach with such a hideous suggestion of a cannon-ball about it.

All the ghastly instances, too, of accidents to life and limb in the football field came unpleasantly into his memory, and he saw the inadvisability of mingling with the crowd and allowing himself to be kicked violently on the shins.

So he trotted industriously about at a safe distance in order to allay suspicion, while waiting for a good opportunity to put his scheme of escape into execution.

At last he could wait no longer, for the fearful thought occurred to him that, if he remained there much longer, the doctor—who, as he knew from Dick, always came to superintend, if not to share, the sports of his pupils—might make his appearance, and then his chance would be lost for the present, for he knew too well that he should never find courage to ask permission from *him*.

With a beating heart he went up to Mr. Tinkler, who was still

on the fence with his novel, and asked as humbly as he could bring himself to do:

"If you please, sir, will you allow me to go home? I'm—I'm not feeling at all well."

"Not well? What's the matter with you?" said Mr. Tinkler, without looking up.

Paul had not prepared himself for details, and the sudden question rather threw him off his guard.

"A slight touch of liver," he said at length. "It takes me after meals sometimes."

"Liver!" said Mr. Tinkler, "you've no right to such a thing at your age; it's all nonsense, you know. Run in and play, that'll set you up again."

"It's fatal, sir," said Paul. "My doctor expressly warned me against taking any violent exercise soon after luncheon. If you knew what liver is, you wouldn't say so!"

Mr. Tinkler stared, as well he might, but making nothing of it, and being chiefly anxious not to be interrupted any longer, only said:

"Oh, well, don't bother me; I dare say it's all right. Cut along!"

So Mr. Bultitude was free; the path lay open to him now. He knew he would have little difficulty in finding his way to the station, and, once there, he would have the whole afternoon in which to wait for a train to town.

"I've managed that excellently," he thought, as he ran blithely off, almost like the boy he seemed. "Not the slightest hitch. I defy the Fates themselves to stop me now!"

But the Fates are ladies, and—not of course that it follows—occasionally spiteful. It is very rash, indeed, to be ungallant enough to defy them—they have such an unpleasant habit of accepting the challenge.

Mr. Bultitude had hardly got clear of the groups scattered about the field, when he met a small flaxen-haired boy, who was just coming down to join the game. It was Porter, his neighbor of the German lesson.

"There you are, Bultitude, then," he said, in his squeaky voice; "I want you."

"I can't stop," said Paul, "I'm in a hurry—another time."

"Another time won't do," said little Porter, laying hold of him by his jacket. "I want that rabbit."

This outrageous demand took Mr. Bultitude's breath away He had no idea what rabbit was referred to, or why he should be required to produce such an animal at a moment's notice. This was the second time that an inconvenient small boy had interfered between him and liberty. He would not be baffled twice. He tried to shake off his persecutor.

"I tell you, my good boy, I haven't such a thing about me. I haven't, indeed. I don't even know what you're talking about."

This denial enraged Porter.

"I say, you fellows," he called out, "come here! Do make Bultitude give me my rabbit. He says he doesn't know anything about it now!"

At this, several of the loungers came up, glad of a distraction.

"What's the matter?" some of them asked.

"Why," whined Porter, "he promised to bring me back a rabbit this term, and now he pretends he does not know anything about it. Make him say what he's done with it!"

Mr. Bultitude was not usually ready of resource, but now he had what seemed a happy thought.

"Gad!" he cried, pretending to recollect it, "so I did—to be sure, a rabbit, of course, how could I forget it? It's—it's a splendid rabbit. I'll go and fetch it!"

"Will you," cried Porter, half relieved. "Where is it, then?"

"Where?" said Paul, sharply (he was growing positively brilliant). "Why, in my playbox, to be sure; where should it be?"

"It isn't in your playbox, I know," put in Siggers; "because I saw it turned out yesterday, and there was no rabbit then. Besides, how could a rabbit live in a playbox? He's telling lies. I can see it by his face. He hasn't any rabbit!"

"Of course I haven't!" said Mr. Bultitude. "How should I? I'm not a conjurer. It 's not a habit of mine to go about with rabbits concealed on my person. What's the use of coming to me like this? It's absurd, you know; perfectly absurd!"

The crowd increased until there was quite a ring formed round Mr. Bultitude and the indignant claimant, and presently Tipping came bustling up.

"What's the row here, you fellows?" he said. "Bultitude again, of course. What's he been doing now?"

"He had a rabbit he said he was keeping for me," explained little Porter; "and now he won't give it up or tell me what he's done with it."

"He has some mice he ought to give us, too," said one or two new comers, edging their way to the front.

Mr. Bultitude was, of course, exceedingly annoyed at this unlooked-for interruption, and still more by such utterly preposterous claims on him for animals; however, it was easy to explain that he had no such things in his possession, and after that of course no more could be said. He was beginning to disclaim all liability, when Siggers stopped him.

"Keep that for the present," he said. "I say, we ought to have a regular trial over this, and get at the truth of it properly. Let's fetch him along to the goal-posts and judge him!"

He fixed upon the goal-posts as being somehow more formal, and, as his proposal was well received, two of them grasped Mr. Bultitude by the collar and dragged him along in procession to the appointed spot between the two flags, while Siggers followed in what he conceived to be a highly judicial manner, and evidently enjoying himself prodigiously.

Paul, though highly indignant, allowed himself to be led along without resistence. It was safest to humor them, for after all it would not last long, and when they were tired of baiting him he would watch his time and slip quietly away.

When they reached the goal-posts Siggers arranged them in a circle, placing himself, the hapless Paul, and his accusers in the center. "You chaps had better all be jurymen," he said. "I'll be judge, and unless he makes a clean breast of it," he added, with judicial impartiality, "the court will jolly well punch his ugly young head off."

Siggers' father was an Old Bailey barrister in good and rather sharp practice, so that it was clearly the son's mission to preside on this occasion. But unfortunately his hour of office was doomed to be a brief one, for Mr. Blinkhorn, becoming aware that the game was being still more scantily supported, and noticing the crowd at the goal, came up to know the reason of it at a long, camel-like trot, his hat on the back of his head, his mild face flushed with exertion, and his pebble glasses gleaming in the winter sunshine.

"What are you all doing here? Why don't you join the game? I've come here to play football with you, and how can I do it if you all slink off and leave me to play with myself?" he asked, with pathos.

"Please, sir," said Siggers, alarmed at the threatened loss of his dignity, "it's a trial, and I'm judge."

"Yes, sir," the whole ring shouted together. "We're trying Bultitude, sir."

On the whole, perhaps, Mr. Bultitude was glad of this interference. At least justice would be done now, although this usher had blundered so unpardonably that morning.

"This is childish, you know," said Mr. Blinkhorn, "and it's not football. The doctor will be seriously angry if he comes and sees you trifling here. Let the boy go."

"But he's cheated some of the fellows, sir," grumbled Tipping and Siggers together.

"Well, you've no right to punish him if he has. Leave him to me."

"Will you see fair play between them, sir? He oughtn't to be let off without being made to keep his word."

"If there is any dispute between you and Bultitude," said Mr. Blinkhorn, "I have no objection to settle it—provided it is within my province."

"Settle it without me," said Paul, hurriedly. "I've leave to go home. I'm ill."

"Who gave you leave to go home?" asked the master.

"That young man over there on the rails," said Paul.

"I am the proper person to apply to for leave; you know that well enough," said Mr. Blinkhorn, with a certain coldness in his tone. "Now then, Porter, what is all this business about?"

"Please, sir," said Porter, "he told me last term he had a lot of rabbits at home, and if I liked he would bring me back a lop-eared one and let me have it cheap, and I gave him two shillings, sir, and sixpence for a hutch to keep it in; and now he pretends he doesn't know anything about it!"

To Paul's horror two or three other boys came forward with much the same tale. He remembered now that during the holidays he had discovered that Dick was maintaining a sort of amateur menagerie in his bedroom, and that he had ordered the whole of the livestock to be got rid of or summarily destroyed.

Now it seemed that the wretched Dick had already disposed of it to these clamorous boys, and, what was worse, had stipulated with considerable forethought for payment in advance. For the first time he repented his paternal harshness. Like the netted lion, a paltry white mouse or two would have set him free; but, less happy than the beast in the fable, he had not one!

He tried to stammer out excuses.

"It's extremely unfortunate," he said, "but the fact is I'm not in a position to meet this—this sudden call upon me. Some other day, perhaps——"

"None of your long words, now," growled Tipping. (Boys hate long words as much as even a Saturday Reviewer.) "Why haven't you brought the rabbits?"

"Yes," said Mr. Blinkhorn, "why, having promised to bring the rabbits with you, haven't you kept your word? You must be able to give some explanation."

"Because," said Mr. Bultitude, wriggling with embarrassment, "I—that is, my father—found out that my young rascal of a son—I mean his young rascal of a son (*me*, you know) was, contrary to my express orders, keeping a couple of abominable rabbits in his bedroom, and a quantity of filthy little white mice which he tried to train to climb up the banisters. And I kept

finding the brutes running about my bath-room, and—well, of course I put a stop to it; and—no, what am I saying?—my father, of course, he put a stop to it; and, in point of fact, had them all drowned in a pail of water."

It might be thought that he had an excellent opportunity here of avowing himself, but there was the risk that Mr. Blinkhorn would disbelieve him, and, with the boys, he felt that the truth would do anything but increase his popularity. But dissembling fails sometimes outside the copy-books, and Mr. Bultitude's rather blundering attempt at it only landed him in worse difficulties.

There was a yell of rage and disappointment from the defrauded ones, who had cherished a lingering hope that young Bultitude had those rabbits somewhere, but (like Mr. Barkis and his China lemon) found himself unable to part with them when the time came to fulfill his contract. And, as contempt is a frame of mind highly stimulating to one's self-esteem, even those who had no personal interest in the matter joined in the execrations with hearty goodwill and sympathy.

"Why did you let him do it? They were ours, not his. What right had your governor to go and drown our rabbits, eh?" they cried, wrathfully.

"What right?" said Paul. "Mustn't a man do as he pleases in his own house, then? I—he was not obliged to see the house overrun with vermin, I suppose?"

But this only made them angrier, and they resented his defense with hoots, and groans, and hisses.

Mr. Blinkhorn meanwhile was pondering the affair conscientiously. At last he said: "But you know the doctor would never allow animals to be kept in the school, if Bultitude had brought them. The whole thing is against the rules, and I shall not interfere."

"Ah, but," said Chawner, "he promised them all to day-boarders. The doctor couldn't object to that, could he, sir?"

"True," said Mr. Blinkhorn, "true. I was not aware of that. Well then, Bultitude, since you are prevented from performing what you promised to do, I'm sure you won't object to do what is fair and right in the matter?"

"I don't think I quite follow you," said Mr. Bultitude. But he dreaded what was coming next.

"It's very simple. You have taken money from these boys, and if you can't give them value for it, you ought to return all you took from them. I'm sure you see that yourself."

"I don't admit that I owe them anything," said Paul; "and at all events it is highly inconvenient to pay them now."

"If your own sense of honor isn't enough," said Mr. Blink-

horn, "I must take the matter into my own hands. Let every boy who has any claim upon him tell me exactly what it is."

One boy after another brought forward his claim. One had entrusted Dick, it appeared, with a shilling, for which he was to receive a mouse with a "plum saddle," and two others had invested nine pence each in white mice. With Porter's half-crown, the total came to precisely five shillings—all Paul had in the world, the one rope by which he could ever hope to haul himself up to his lost pinnacle!

Mr. Blinkhorn, naturally enough, saw no reason why the money, being clearly due, should not be paid at once. "Give me any money you have about you, Bultitude," he said, "and I'll satisfy your debts with it, as far as it goes."

Paul clasped his arm convulsively. "No!" he cried, hoarsely, "not that! Don't make me do that! I—I can't pay them—not now. They don't understand. If they only give me time they shall have double their money back—wagon-loads of rabbits, the best rabbits money can buy—if they'll wait. Tell them to wait! My dear sir, don't see me wronged! I won't pay now!"

"They have waited long enough," said Mr. Blinkhorn; "you must pay them."

"I tell you I won't!" cried Paul; "do you hear? Not one sixpence. Oh, if you knew! That infernal Garudâ Stone! What fools people are!"

Then in his despair he did the most fatal thing possible. He tried to save himself by flight, and with a violent plunge broke through the circle and made for the road which led toward the station.

Instantly the whole school, only too glad of the excitement, was at his heels. The unhappy old merchant ran as he had not run for a quarter of a century, faster even than he had on his first experience of Coggs' and Coker's society on that memorable Monday night. But in spite of his efforts the chase was a short one. Chawner and Tipping very soon had him by the collar, and brought him back, struggling and kicking out viciously, to Mr. Blinkhorn, whose good opinion he had now lost forever.

"Please, sir," said Chawner, "I can feel something like a purse in his pocket. Shall I take it out, sir?"

"As he refuses to act with common honesty—yes," said Mr. Blinkhorn.

It was Dick's purse, of course; and, in spite of Paul's frantic efforts to retain it, it was taken from him, its contents equitably divided among the claimants, and the purse itself returned to him—empty.

"Now, Bultitude," said Mr. Blinkhorn, "if you really wish to leave the field, you may."

Mr. Bultitude lost what little temper he had yet to lose; he flung the useless purse from him and broke away from them all in a condition little removed from insanity.

Leave the field! What a mockery the permission was now. How was he to get home, a distance of more than fifty miles, without a penny in his pockets? Ten minutes before, and freedom was within his grasp, and now it had eluded him and was as hopelessly out of reach as ever.

No one pitied him; no one understood the real extent of his loss. Mr. Blinkhorn and the few enthusiasts went back to their unobtrusive game, while the rest of the school discussed the affair in groups, the popular indignation against young Bultitude's hitherto unsuspected meanness growing more marked every instant.

It might have even taken some decided and objectionable form before long, but when it was at its height there was a sudden cry of alarm. "*Cave*, you fellows, here's Grim!" and indeed in the far distance the doctor's portly and imposing figure could be seen just turning the corner into the field.

Mr. Bultitude felt almost cheered. This coming to join his pupil's sports showed a good heart; the doctor would almost certainly be in a good humor, and he cheated himself into believing that, at some interval in the game, he might perhaps find courage to draw near and seek to interest him in his incredible woes.

It was quite extraordinary to see how the game, which had hitherto decidedly languished and hung fire, now quickened into briskness and became positively spirited. Every one developed a hearty interest in it, and it would almost seem as if the boys, with more delicacy than they are generally credited with, were unwilling to let their master guess how little his indulgence was really appreciated. Even Mr. Tinkler, whose novel had kept him spell-bound on his rail all through the recent excitement, now slipped it hurriedly into his pocket and rushed energetically into the fray, shouting encouragement rather indiscriminately to either side, till he had an opportunity of finding out privately to which leader he had been assigned.

Dr. Grimstone came down the field at a majestic slow trot, calling out to the players as he came on—"Well done, Mutlow! Finely played, sir! Dribole it along now. Ah, you re afraid of it! Run into it, sir, run into it! No running with the ball now, Siggers; play without those petty meannesses, or leave the game! There, leave the ball to me, will you—leave it to me!"

And, as the ball had rolled in his direction, he punted it in an exceedingly dignified manner, the whole school keeping respect-

fully apart, until he had brought it to a reasonable distance from the goal, when he kicked it through with great solemnity, amid faint, and it is to be feared somewhat sycophantic, applause, and turned away with the air of a man surfeited of success.

"For which side did I win that?" he asked presently, whereupon Tipping explained that his side had been the favored one. "Well then," he said, "you fellows must all back me up, or I shall not play for you any more;" and he kicked off the ball for the next game.

It was noticeable that the party thus distinguished did not seem precisely overwhelmed with pleasure at the compliment, which, as they knew from experience, implied considerable exertion on their part, and even disgrace if they were unsuccessful.

The other side, too, looked unhappy, feeling themselves in a position of extreme delicacy and embarrassment. For, if they played their best, they ran some risk of offending the doctor, or, what was worse, drawing him over into their ranks; while if, on the other hand, they allowed themselves to be too easily worsted, they might be suspected of sulkiness and temper—offenses which he was very ready to discover and resent.

Dr. Grimstone for his part enjoyed the exercise, and had no idea that he was not a thoroughly welcome and valued playmate. But though it was pleasant to outsiders to see a schoolmaster permitting himself to share in the recreations of his pupils, it must be owned that to the latter the advantages of the arrangement seemed something more than dubious.

Mr. Bultitude being on the side adopted by the doctor, found too soon that he was expected to bestir himself. More than ever anxious now to conciliate, he did his very best to conquer his natural repugnance and appear more interested than alarmed as the ball came in his way; but, although (to use a boating expression) he "sugared" with some adroitness, he was promptly found out, for his son had been a dashing and plucky player.

It was bitter for him to run meekly about while scathing sarcasms and comments on his want of courage were being hurled at his head. It shattered the scanty remnants of his self-respect, but he dared not protest or say a single word to open the doctor's eyes to the injustice he was doing him.

He was unpleasantly reminded, too, of the disfavor he had acquired among his companions, by some one or other of them running up to him every moment when the doctor's attention was called elsewhere, and startling his nerves by a sly jog or pinch, or an abusive epithet hissed viciously into his ears—Chawner being especially industrious in this respect.

And in this unsatisfactory way the afternoon dragged along

until the dusk gathered and the lamps were lighted, and it became too dark to see goal-posts or ball.

By the time play was stopped, and the school reformed for the march home, Mr. Bultitude felt that he was glad even to get back to labor as a relief from such a form of enjoyment. It was perhaps the most miserable afternoon he had ever spent in his whole easy-going life. In the course of it he had passed from brightest hope to utter despair; and now nothing remained to him but to convince the doctor, which he felt quite unequal to do, or to make his escape without money—which would inevitably end in a recapture.

May no one who reads this ever be placed upon the horns of such a dilemma!

CHAPTER IX.

A LETTER FROM HOME.

"Here are a few of the unpleasantest words
That ever blotted paper. . . .
A letter,
And every word in it a gaping wound."
Merchant of Venice.

If it were not that it was so absolutely essential to the interest of this story, I think I should almost prefer to draw a veil over the sufferings of Mr. Bultitude during the rest of that unhappy week at Crichton House; but it would only be false delicacy to do so.

Things went worse and worse with him. The real Dick in his most objectionable moods could never have contrived to render himself one quarter so disliked and suspected as his substitute was by the whole school—master and boys.

It was in a great measure his own fault, too; for to an ordinary boy the life there would not have had any intolerable hardships, if it held out no exceptional attractions. But he would not accommodate himself to circumstances, and try, during his enforced stay, to get as much instruction and enjoyment as possible out of his new life.

Perhaps, in his position, it would be too much to expect such a thing, and, at all events, it never even occurred to him to attempt it. He consumed himself instead with inward raging and

chafing at his hard lot, and his utter powerlessness to break the spell which bound him.

Sometimes, indeed, he would resolve to bear it no longer, and would start up impulsively to impart his misfortunes to some one in minor authority—not the doctor; he had given that up in resigned despair long since. But, as surely as ever he found himself coming to the point, the words would stick fast in his throat, and he was only too thankful to get away, with his tale untold, on any frivolous pretext that first suggested itself.

This, of course, brought him into suspicion, for such conduct had the appearance of a systematic course of practical joking, and even the most impartial teachers will sometimes form an unfavorable opinion of a particular boy on rather slender grounds, and then find fresh confirmation of it in his most insignificant actions.

As for the school generally, his scowls and his sullenness, his deficiency in the daring and impudence that had warmed their hearts toward Dick, and, above all, his strange knack of getting them into trouble—for he seldom received what he considered an indignity without making a formal complaint—all this brought him as much hearty dislike and contempt as, perhaps, the most unsympathetic boy ever earned since boarding-schools were first invented.

The only boy who still seemed to retain a secret tenderness for him as the Dick he had once looked up to and admired, was Jolland, who persisted in believing, and in stating his belief, that this apparent change of demeanor was a perverted kind of joke on Bultitude's part, which he would condescend to explain some day when it had gone far enough, and he wearied and annoyed Paul beyond endurance by perpetually urging him to abandon his ill-judged experiment and discover the point of the jest.

But for Jolland's help, which he persevered in giving in spite of the opposition and unpopularity it brought upon himself, Mr. Bultitude would have found it impossible to make any pretense of performing the tasks required of him.

He found himself expected, as a matter of course, to have a certain familiarity with Greek paradigms and German conversation scraps, propositions in Euclid and Latin gerunds, of all of which, having had a strict commercial education in his young days, he had not so much as heard before his metamorphosis. But by carefully copying Jolland's exercises, and introducing enough mistakes of his own to supply the necessary local color, he was able to escape to a great degree the discovery of his blank ignorance on all these subjects—an ignorance which

would certainly have been put down as mere idleness and obstinacy.

But it will be readily believed that he lived in constant fear of such discovery, and, as it was, his dependence on a little scamp like his son's friend was a sore humiliation to one who had naturally supposed hitherto that any knowledge he had not happened to acquire could only be meretricious and useless.

He led a nightmare sort of existence for some days, until something happened which roused him from his state of passive misery into one more attempt at protest.

It was Saturday morning and he had come down to breakfast, after being knocked about as usual in the dormitory over night, with a dull wonder how long this horrible state of things could possibly be going to last, when he saw on his plate a letter with the Paddington post-mark, addressed in a familiar hand—his daughter Barbara's.

For an instant his hopes rose high. Surely the impostor had been found out at last, and the envelope would contain an urgent invitation to him to come back and resume his rights—an invitation which he might show to the doctor as his best apology.

But when he looked at the address, which was "Master Richard Bultitude," he felt a misgiving. It was unlikely that Barbara would address him thus if she knew the truth; he hesitated before tearing it open.

Then he tried to persuade himself that of course she would have the sense to keep up appearances for his own sake on the outside of the letter, and he compelled himself to open the envelope with fingers that trembled nervously.

The very first sentences scattered his faint expectations to the winds. He read on with staring eyes, till the room seemed to rock with him like a packet-boat, and the sprawling schoolgirl handwriting, crossed and recrossed on the thin paper, changed to letters of scorching flame. But perhaps it will be better to give the letter in full, so that the reader may judge for himself whether it was calculated or not to soothe and encourage the exiled one.

Here it is:

"My Dearest Darling Dick: I hope you have not been expecting a letter from me before this, but I had such lots to tell you that I waited till I had time to tell it all at once. For I have such news for you! You can't think how pleased you will be when you hear it. Where shall I begin? I hardly know, for it still seems so funny and strange—almost like a dream—only I hope we shall never wake up.

"I think I must tell you anyhow, just as it comes. Well,

ever since you went away (how was it you never came up to say good-by to us in the drawing-room? We couldn't believe till we heard the door shut that you really had driven away without another word!) Where am I? Oh, ever since you went away, dear papa has been completely changed; you would hardly believe it unless you saw him. He is quite jolly and boyish—only fancy! and we are always telling him that he is the biggest baby of us all, but it only makes him laugh. Once, you know, he would have been awfully angry if we had even hinted at it.

"Do you know, I really think that the real reason he was so cross and sharp with us that last week was because you were going away; for, now the wrench of parting is over, he is quite light-hearted again. You know how he always hates showing his feelings.

"He is so altered now, you can't think. He has actually only once been up to the city since you left, and then he came home at four o'clock, and he seems to quite like to have us all about him. Generally he stays at home all the morning, and plays at soldiers with baby in the dining-room. You would laugh to see him loading the cannons with real powder and shot, and he didn't care a bit when some of it made holes in the sideboard and smashed the looking-glass.

"We had such fun the other afternoon; we played at brigands—papa and all of us. Papa had the upper conservatory for a robber-cave, and stood there keeping guard with your popgun; and he wouldn't let the servants go by without a kiss, unless they showed a written pass from us! Miss McFadden called in the middle of it, but she said she wouldn't come in, as papa seemed to be enjoying himself so. Boaler has given warning, but we can't think why. We have been out nearly every evening—once to Hengler's and once to the Christy Minstrels, and last night to the pantomime, where papa was so pleased with the clown that he sent round afterward and asked him to dine here on Sunday, when Sir Benjamin and Lady Bangle and Alderman Fishwick are coming. Won't it be jolly to see a clown close to? Should you think he'd come in *his* evening dress? Miss Mangnall has been given a month's holiday, because papa didn't like to see us always at lessons. Think of that!

"We are going to have the whole house done up and refurnished at last. Papa chose the furniture for the drawing-room yesterday. It is all in yellow satin, which is rather bright, I think. I haven't seen the carpet yet, but it is to match the furniture; and there is a lovely hearth-rug, with a lion-hunt worked on it.

"But that isn't the best of it; we are going to have the big children's party, after all! No one but children invited, and

every one to do what they like. I wanted so much to have you home for it, but papa said it would only unsettle you, and take you away from your work.

"Had Dulcie forgotten you? I should like to see her so much. Now I really must leave off, as I am going to the Aquarium with papa. Mind you write me as good a letter as this is, if that old doctor lets you. Minnie and Roly send love and kisses, and papa sends his kind regards, and I am to say he hopes you are settling down steadily to work.

"With best love, your affectionate sister,

"BARBARA BULTITUDE.

"P. S.—I nearly forgot to say that Uncle Duke came the other day, and has stayed here ever since. He is going to make papa's fortune! I believe by a gold mine he knows about somewhere, and a steam tramway in Lapland. But I don't like him very much—he is so polite."

It would be nothing short of an insult to the reader's comprehension if I were to enter into an elaborate explanation of the effect this letter had upon Mr. Bultitude. He took it by degrees, trying to steady his nerves at each additional item of poor Barbara's well-meant intelligence by a sip at his tin-flavored coffee. But when he came to the postscript, in spite of its purport being mercifully broken to him gradually by the extreme difficulty of making it out from two undercurrents of manuscript, he choked convulsively, and spilled his coffee.

Dr. Grimstone visited this breach of etiquette with stern promptness.

"This conduct at table is disgraceful, sir—perfectly disgraceful—unworthy of a civilized being. I have been a teacher of youth for many years, and never till now did I have the pain of seeing a pupil of mine choke in his breakfast-cup with such deplorable ill-breeding. It's pure greediness, sir, and you will have the goodness to curb your indecent haste in consuming your food for the future. Your excellent father has frequently complained to me, with tears in his eyes, of the impossibility of teaching you to behave at meals with common propriety!"

There was a faint chuckle along the tables, and several drank coffee with studied elegance and self-repression, either as a valuable example to Dick, or as a personal advertisement. But Paul was in no mood for reproof and instruction. He stood up in his excitement, flourishing his letter wildly.

"Dr. Grimstone," he said, "never mind my behavior now. I've something to tell you. I can't bear it any longer. I must go home at once—at once, sir!"

There was a general sensation at this, for his manner was peremptory and almost dictatorial. Some thought he would get a

licking on the strength of it, and most hoped so. But the doctor dismissed them to the play-ground, keeping Paul back to be dealt with in privacy.

Mrs. Grimstone played nervously with her dry toast at the end of the table, for she could not endure to see the boys in trouble, and dreaded a scene, while Dulcie looked on with wide, bright eyes.

"Now, sir," said the doctor, looking up from his marmalade, "why must you go home at once?"

"I've just had a letter," stammered Paul.

"No one ill at home, I hope?"

"No, no," said Paul, "it's not that; it's worse! She doesn't know what horrible things she tells me!"

"Who is 'she?'" said the doctor—and Dulcie's eyes were larger still and her face paled.

"I decline to say," said Mr. Bultitude. It would have been absurd to say "my daughter," and he had not presence of mind just then to transpose the relationships with neatness and success. "But indeed I am wanted most badly!"

"What are you wanted for, pray?"

"Everything!" declared Paul. "It's all going to rack and ruin without me!"

"That's absurd," said the doctor; "you're not such an important individual as all that, Master Bultitude. But let me see the letter."

Show him the letter—lay bare all those follies of Dick's, the burden of which he might have to bear himself very shortly—never! Besides, what would be the use of it? It would be no argument in favor of sending him home—rather the reverse—so Paul was obliged to say:

"Excuse me, Dr. Grimstone, it is—ah—of a private nature. I don't feel at liberty to show it to any one."

"Then, sir," said the doctor, with some reason, "if you can't tell me who or what it is that requires your presence at home, and decline to show me the letter, which would presumably give me some idea on the subject, how do you expect that I am to listen to such a preposterous demand, eh? Just tell me that!"

Once more would Paul have given worlds for the firmness and presence of mind to state his case clearly and effectively; and he could hardly have had a better opportunity, for schoolmasters cannot always be playing the tyrant, and the doctor was, in spite of his attempts to be stern, secretly more amused than angry at what seemed a peculiarly precocious piece of effrontery.

But Paul felt the dismal absurdity of his position. Nothing he had said, nothing he could say, short of the truth, would

avail him, and the truth was precisely what he felt most unable to tell. He hung his head resignedly, and held his tongue in confusion.

"Pooh!" said the doctor at last; "let me have no more of this tomfoolery, Bultitude. It's getting to be a positive nuisance. Don't come to me with any more of these ridiculous stories, or some day I shall be annoyed. There, go away, and be contented where you are, and try to behave like other people."

"Contented!" muttered Paul, when out of hearing, as he went upstairs and through the empty school-room into the playground. "'Behave like other people!' Ah, yes, I suppose I shall have to come to that in time. But that letter— Everything upside down— Bangle asked to meet a common clown! That fellow Duke letting me in for gold mines and tramways! It's all worse than I ever dreamed of; and I must stay here and be 'contented!' It's—it's perfectly damnable!"

All through that morning his thoughts ran in the same doleful groove, until the time for work came to an end, and he found himself in the playground, and free to indulge his melancholy in solitude; for the others were still loitering about in the school-room, and a glass out-house originally intended for a conservatory, but now devoted to boots and slates, and the books liberally besmeared with gilt, and telling of the exploits of boy-heroes so beloved of boys.

Mr. Bultitude, only too delighted to get away from them for a little while, was leaning against the parallel bars in dull despondency, when he heard a rustling in the laurel hedge which cut off the house garden from the graveled playground, and looking up, saw Dulcie slip through the shrubs and come toward him with an air of determination in her proud little face.

She looked prettier and daintier than ever in her gray plush hat and warm fur tippet; but, of course, Paul was not of the age or in the mood to be much affected by such things—he turned his head pettishly away.

"It's no use doing that, Dick," she said; "I'm tired of sulking. I shan't sulk any more till I have an explanation."

Paul made the sound generally written "Pshaw!"

"You ought to tell me everything. I will know it. Oh, Dick, you might tell me! I always told you anything you wanted to know; and I let mamma think it was I broke the clock-shade last term, and you know you did it. And I want to know something so very badly!"

"It's no use coming to me, you know," said Paul. "I can't do anything for you."

"Yes, you can; you know you can!" said Dulcie, impulsively.

"You can tell me what was in that letter you had at breakfast—and you shall, too!"

"What an inquisitive little girl you are!" said Paul, sententiously. "It's not nice for little girls to be so inquisitive—it doesn't look well."

"I knew it!" cried Dulcie; "you don't want to tell me—because- -because it's from that other horrid girl you like better than me. And you promised to belong to me for ever and ever, and now it's all over! Say it isn't! Oh, Dick, promise to give the other girl up. I'm sure she's not a nice girl. She's written you an unkind letter; now hasn't she?"

"Upon my word," said Paul, "this is very forward; at your age, too! Why, my Barbara——"

"Your Barbara! You dare to call her that? Oh, I knew I was right; I *will* see that letter now. Give it me this instant!" said Dulcie, imperiously; and Paul really felt almost afraid of her.

"No, no," he said, retreating a step or two, "it's all a mistake; there's nothing to get into such a passion about—there isn't indeed! And—don't cry—you're really a pretty little girl. I only wish I could tell you everything; but you'd never believe me!"

"Oh, yes, I would, Dick!" protested Dulcie, only too willing to be convinced of her boy-lover's constancy; "I'll believe anything, if you'll only tell me. And I'm sorry I was so angry. Sit down by me and tell me from the very beginning. I promise not to interrupt."

Paul thought for a moment. After all, why shouldn't he? It was much pleasanter to tell his sorrows to her pretty little ear and hear her childish wonder and pity than face her terrible father—he had tried that. And then she might tell her mother; and so his story might reach the doctor's ears after all, without further effort on his part.

"Well," he said at last, "I think you're a good-natured little girl; you won't laugh. Perhaps I will tell you!"

So he sat down on the bench by the wall, and Dulcie, quite happy again now at this proof of good faith, nestled up against him confidingly, waiting for his first words with parted lips and eager, sparkling eyes.

"Not many days ago," began Paul, "I was somebody very different from——"

"Oh, indeed," said a jarring, sneering voice close by; "was you?" And he looked up and saw Tipping standing over him with a plainly hostile intent.

"Go away, Tipping," said Dulcie; "we don't want you. Dick is telling me a secret."

"He's very fond of telling, I know," retorted Tipping. "If

you knew what a sneak he was you'd have nothing to do with him, Dulcie. I could tell you things about him that——"

"He's not a sneak," said Dulcie. "Are you, Dick? Why don't you go, Tipping? Never mind what he says, Dick; go on as if he wasn't there. I don't care what he says!"

It was a most unpleasant situation for Mr. Bultitude, but he did not like to offend Tipping. "I—I think—some other time, perhaps," he said, nervously. "Not now."

"Ah, you're afraid to say what you were going to say now I'm here," said the amiable Tipping, nettled by Dulcie's little air of haughty disdain. "You're a coward; you know you are. You pretend to think such a lot of Dulcie here, but you daren't fight!"

"Fight!" said Mr. Bultitude. "Eh, what for?"

"Why, for her, of course. You can't care much about her if you daren't fight for her. I want to show her who's the best man of the two!"

"I don't want to be shown," wailed poor Dulcie, piteously, clinging to the reluctant Paul; "I know. Don't fight with him, Dick. I say you're not to."

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Bultitude, with great decision. "I shouldn't think of such a thing!" and he rose from the bench and was about to walk away, when Tipping suddenly pulled off his coat and began to make sundry demonstrations of a martial nature, such as dancing aggressively toward his rival and clinching his fists.

By this time most of the other boys had come down into the playground, and were looking on with great interest. There was an element of romance in this promised combat which gave it additional attractions. It was like one of the struggles between knightly champions in the Waverley novels. Several of them would have fought till they couldn't see out of their eyes if it would have given them the least chance of obtaining favor in Dulcie's sight, and they all envied Dick, who was the only boy that was not unmercifully snubbed by their capricious little princess.

Paul alone was blind to the splendor of his privileges. He examined Tipping carefully, as the latter was still assuming a hostile attitude and chanting a sort of war-cry supposed to be an infallible incentive to strife. "Yah, you're afraid!" he sang very offensively. "I wouldn't be afraid! Cowardy, cowardy, custard!"

"Pooh!" said Paul, at last; "go away, sir, go away!"

"Go away, eh?" jeered Tipping. "Who are you to tell me to go away? Go away yourself!"

"Certainly," said Paul, only too happy to oblige. But he found himself prevented by a ring of excited backers.

"Don't funk it, Dick!" cried some, forgetting recent ill-feeling in the necessity for partisanship. "Go in and settle him as you did that last time. I'll send you. You can do it!"

"Don't hit each other in the face," pleaded Dulcie, who had got upon a bench and was looking down into the ring—not, if the truth must be told, without a certain pleasurable excitement in the feeling that it was all about her.

And now Mr. Bultitude discovered that he was seriously expected to fight this great hulking boy, and that the sole reason for any disagreement was an utterly unfounded jealousy respecting this little girl Dulcie. He had not a grain of chivalry in his disposition—chivalry being an eminently unpractical virtue—and naturally he saw no advantage in letting himself be mauled for the sake of a child younger than his own daughter.

Dulcie's appeal enraged Tipping, who took it as addressed solely to himself. "You ought to be glad to stick up for her," he said between his teeth. "I'll mash you for this—see if I don't!"

Paul thought he saw his way clear to disabuse Tipping of his mistaken idea. "Are you proposing," he asked, politely, "to—to 'mash' me on account of that little girl there on the seat?"

"You'll soon see," growled Tipping. "Shut your head, and come on!"

"No, but I want to know," persisted Mr. Bultitude. "Because," he said, with a sickly attempt at jocularity which delighted none, "you see, I don't want to be mashed. I'm not a potato. If I understand you aright, you want to fight me because you think me likely to interfere with your claim to that little girl's—ah—affections?"

"That's it," said Tipping, gruffly; "so you'd better waste no more words about it, and come on."

"But I don't care about coming on," protested Paul, earnestly. "It's all a mistake. I've no doubt she's a very nice little girl, but I assure you, my good boy, I've no desire to stand in your way for one instant. She's nothing to me—nothing at all! I give her up to you. Take her, young fellow, with my blessing! There, now, that's all settled comfortably—eh?"

He was just looking around with a self-satisfied and relieved air, when he began to be aware that his act of frank unselfishness was not as much appreciated as it deserved. Tipping, indeed, looked baffled and irresolute for one moment, but a low murmur of disgust arose from the bystanders, and even Jolland declared that it was "too beastly mean."

As for Dulcie, she had been looking on incredulously at her champion's unaccountable tardiness in coming to the point. But this public repudiation was too much for her. She gave a little low cry as she heard the shameless words of recantation,

and then, without a word, jumped lightly down from her bench and ran away to hide herself somewhere and cry.

Even Paul, though he knew that he had done nothing but what was strictly right, and had acted purely in self-protection, felt unaccountably ashamed of himself as he saw the effect of his speech. But it was too late now.

CHAPTER X.

THE COMPLETE LETTER-WRITER.

"Accelerated by ignominious shovings—nay, as it is written, by smitings, twitchings, spurnings, *a posteriori*, not to be named."—*French Revolution.*

"This letter being so excellently ignorant will breed no terror in the youth."—*Twelfth Night.*

Mr. Bultitude had meant to achieve a double stroke of diplomacy—to undeceive Dulcie and conciliate the love-sick Tipping. But, whatever his success may have been in the former respect, the latter object failed conspicuously.

"You sha'n't get off by a shabby trick like that," said Tipping, exasperated by the sight of Dulcie's emotion; "you've made her cry now, and you shall smart for it. So, now, are you going to stand up to me like a man, or will you take a kicking?"

"I'm not going to help you to commit a breach of the peace," said Paul, with great dignity. "Go away, you quarrelsome young ruffian! Get one of your schoolfellows to fight you, if you must fight. I don't want to be mixed up with you in any way."

But at this Tipping, whose blood was evidently at boiling point, came prancing down on him in a Zulu-like fashion, swinging his long arms like a windmill, and, finding that his enemy made no attempt at receiving him, but only moved away apprehensively, he seized him by the collar, as a prelude to dealing him a series of kicks behind.

Although Mr. Bultitude, as we have seen, was opposed to fighting as a system, he could not submit to this sort of thing without at least some attempt to defend himself; and, judging it of the highest importance to disable his adversary in the most effectual manner before the latter had time to carry out his offensive

designs, he turned sharply round and hit him a very severe blow in the lower part of his waistcoat.

The result fulfilled his highest expectations. Tipping collapsed like a pocket-rule, and staggered away speechless and purple with pain, while Paul stood calm and triumphant. He had shown these fellows that he wasn't going to stand any nonsense. They would leave him alone after this, perhaps.

But once more there were cries and murmurs of "Shame!" "No hitting below the belt!" "Cad—coward!"

It appeared that, somehow, he had managed to offend their prejudices even in this. "It's very odd," he thought; "when I didn't fight they called me a coward, and now when I do, I don't seem to have pleased them much. I don't care, though. I've settled *him*."

But, after a season of protracted writhing by the parallel bars, Tipping came out, still gasping and deadly pale, leaning on Biddlecomb's shoulder, and was met with universal sympathy and condolence.

"Thanks!" he said, with considerable effort. "Of course—I'm not going—to fight him after a low trick like that; but perhaps you fellows will see that he doesn't escape quite as easily as he fancies?"

There was a general shout. "No; he shall pay for it! We'll teach him to fight fair! We'll see if he tries that on again!"

Paul heard it with much uneasiness. What new deviltry were they about to practice upon him? He was not left long in doubt.

"I vote," suggested Biddlecomb, as if he were proposing a testimonial, "we make him run the gauntlet. Grim won't come out and catch us. I saw him go out for a drive an hour ago." And the idea was very favorably entertained.

Paul had heard of "running the gauntlet," and dimly suspected that it was not an experience he was likely to enjoy, particularly when he saw every one busying himself with tying the end of his pocket handkerchief into a hard knot. He tried in vain to excuse himself, declaring again and again that he had never meant to injure the boy. He had only defended himself, and was under the impression that he was at perfect liberty to hit him wherever he could, and so on. But they were in no mood for excuses.

With a stern magisterial formality worthy of a Vehm-Gericht, they formed in two long lines down the center of the playground; and while Paul was still staring in wonder at what this strange maneuver might mean, somebody pounced upon him and carried him up to one end of the ranks, where Tipping had by this time sufficiently recovered to be able to "set him going," as he chose to call it, with a fairly effective kick.

After that he had a confused sense of flying madly along the double line of avengers under a hail of blows which caught him on every part of his head, shoulders, and back, till he reached the end, where he was dexterously turned and sent spinning up to Tipping again, who, in his turn, headed him back on his arrival, and forced him to brave the terrible lane once more.

Never before had Mr. Bultitude felt so sore and insulted. But they kept it up long after the thing had lost its first freshness—until at last exhaustion made them lean to mercy, and they cuffed him ignominiously into a corner, and left him to lament his ill-treatment there till the bell rang for dinner, for which, contrary to precedent, his recent violent exercise had excited little appetite.

"I shall be killed soon if I stay here," he moaned; "I know I shall. These young brigands would murder me cheerfully, if they were not afraid of being caned for it. I'm a miserable old man, and I wish I was dead!"

Although that afternoon, being Saturday, was a half-holiday, Mr. Bultitude was spared the ordeal of another game of football; for a smart storm of rain and sleet, coming on about three o'clock, kept the school—not altogether unwilling prisoners—within doors for the day.

The boys sat in their places in their schoolroom, amusing themselves after their several fashions—some reading, some making libelous copies of drawings that took their fancy in the illustrated papers, some playing games; others, too listless to play and too dull to find pleasure in the simplest books, filled up the time as well as they could by quarreling and getting into various depths of hot water. Paul sat in a corner pretending to read a story relating the experiences of certain infants of phenomenal courage and coolness in the Arctic regions. They killed bears and tamed walruses all through the book; but for the first time, perhaps, since their appearance in print, their exploits fell flat. Not, however, that this reflected any discredit upon the author's powers, which are justly admired by all healthy-minded boys; but it was beyond the power of literature just then to charm Mr. Bultitude's thoughts from the recollection of his misfortunes.

As he took in all the details of his surroundings—the warm, close room; the raw-toned desks and tables at which a rabble of unsympathetic boys were noisily whispering and chattering, with occasional glances in his direction, from which, taught by experience, he augured no good; the high, uncurtained windows, blurred with little stars of half-frozen rain, and the bare, bleak branches of the trees outside tossing drearily against a low, leaden sky—he tried in vain to cheat himself into a dreamy persuasion that all his misery could not be real, but

would fade away as suddenly and mysteriously as it had stolen upon him.

Toward the close of the afternoon the doctor came in and took his place at the writing-table, where he was apparently very busy with the composition of some sort of document, which he finished at last with evident satisfaction at the result of his labor. Then he observed that, according to their custom of a Saturday afternoon, the hour before tea-time should be devoted to "writing home."

So the books, chess-boards, and dominoes were all put away, and a new steel pen and a sheet of note paper, neatly embossed with the heading "Crichton House School" in old English letters, having been served out to every one, each boy prepared himself to write down such things as filial affection, strict truthfulness, and the desire of imparting information might inspire between them.

Paul felt, as he clutched his writing materials, much as a shipwrecked mariner might be expected to do at finding on his desolate island a good-sized flag and a case of rockets, His hopes revived once more; he forgot the smarts left by the knots in the handkerchiefs; he had a whole hour before him—it was possible to set several wires in motion for his release in an hour.

Yes, he must write several letters. First, one to his solicitor, detailing, as calmly and concisely as his feelings would allow, the shameful way in which he had been treated, and imploring him to take measures of some sort for getting him out of his false and awkward position; one to his head clerk, to press upon him the necessity of prudence and caution in dealing with the imposter; notes to Bangle and Fishwick putting them off—they should not be outraged by an introduction to a vulgar pantomime clown under his roof; and, lastly (this was an outburst he could not deny himself), a solemn, impressive appeal to the common humanity, if not to the ordinary filial instincts, of his undutiful son.

His fingers tingled to begin. Sentences of burning, indignant eloquence crowded confusedly into his head—he would write such letters as would carry instant conviction to the most practical and matter-of-fact minds. The pathos and dignity of his remonstrances should melt even Dick's selfish, callous heart.

Perhaps he overrated the power of his pen—perhaps it would have required more than mere ink to persuade his friends to disbelieve their own senses, and see a portly citizen of nearly sixty packed into the frame of a chubby urchin of fourteen. But, at all events, no one's faith was put to so hard a test—those letters were never written.

"Don't begin to write yet, any of you," said the Doctor; "I have a few words to say to you first. In most cases, and as a general rule, I think it wisest to let every boy commit to paper whatever his feelings may dictate to him. I wish to claim no censorship over the style and diction of your letters. But there have been so many complaints lately from the parents of some of the less advanced of you, that I find myself obliged to make a change. Your father particularly, Richard Bultitude," he added, turning suddenly upon the unlucky Paul, "has complained bitterly of the slovenly tone and phrasing of your correspondence: he said, very justly, that they would disgrace a stable-boy, and, unless I could induce you to improve it, he begged he might not be annoyed by it in future."

It was by no means the least galling part of Mr. Bultitude's trials, that forgotten words and deeds of his in his original condition were constantly turning up at critical seasons, and plunging him deeper into the morass just when he saw some prospect of gaining firm ground.

So now, he did remember that, being in a more than usually bad temper one day last year, he had, on receiving a sprawling, ill-spelt application from Dick for more pocket money, to buy fire-works for the 5th of November, written to make some such complaint to the schoolmaster. He waited anxiously for the doctor's next words; he might want to read the letters before they were sent off, in which case Paul would not be displeased, for it would be an easier and less dangerous way of putting the doctor in possession of the facts.

But his complaints were to be honored by a much more effectual remedy, for it naturally piqued the doctor to be told that boys instructed under his auspices wrote like stable-boys.

"However," he went on, "I wish your people at home to be assured from time to time of your welfare, and, to prevent them from being shocked and distressed in future by the crudity of your communications, I have drawn up a short form of letter for the use of the lower boys in the second form—which I shall now proceed to dictate. Of course, all boys in the first form, and all in the second above Bultitude and Jolland, will write as they please as usual. Richard, I expect you to take particular pains to write this out neatly. Are you all ready? Very well then . . . now;" and he read out the following letter, slowly:

"My dear Parents (or parent, according to circumstances) comma" (all of which several took down most industriously)—"You will be rejoiced to hear that, having arrived with safety at our destination, we have by this time fully resumed our customary regular round of earnest work, relieved and sweetened

by hearty play. (Have you all got 'hearty play' down?" inquired the doctor, rather suspiciously, while Jolland observed in an undertone that it would take some time to get *that* down.) "I hope, I trust I may say without undue conceit, to have made considerable progress in my school-tasks before I rejoin the family circle for the Easter vacation, as I think you will admit when I inform you of the programme we intend" ("D. V. in brackets and capital letters"—as before, this was taken down verbatim by Jolland, who probably knew very much better) "to work out during the term.

"In Latin, the class of which I am a member propose to thoroughly master the first book of Virgil's magnificent Epic; need I say I refer to the soul-moving story of the Pious Æneas?" (Jolland was understood by his near neighbor to remark that he thought the explanation distinctly advisable,) "while in Greek we have already commenced the thrilling account of the 'Anabasis' of Xenophon, that master of strategy! nor shall we, of course, neglect in either branch of study the syntax and construction of those two noble languages"—("noble languages," echoed the writers mechanically, contriving to insinuate a touch of irony into the words).

"In German, under the able tutelage of Herr Stohwasser, who, as I may possibly have mentioned to you in casual conversation, is a graduate of the University of Heidelberg" ("and a silly old hass," added Jolland, parenthetically), "we have resigned ourselves to the spell of the Teutonian Shakespeare" (there was much difference of opinion as to the manner of spelling the "Teutonian Shakespeare"), "as, in my opinion, Schiller may be not unaptly termed; and our French studies comprise such exercises, and short poems and tales, as are best calculated to afford an insight into the intricacies of the Gallic tongue.

"But I would not have you imagine, my dear parents (or parent, as before), that, because the claims of the intellect have been thus amply provided for, the requirements of the body are necessarily overlooked!

"I have no intention of becoming a mere bookworm, and, on the contrary, we have had one excessively brisk and pleasant game of football already this season, and should, but for the unfortunate inclemency of the weather, have engaged again this afternoon in the mimic warfare.

"In the playground our favorite diversion is the game of 'chevy,' so called from that engagement famed in ballad and history (I allude to the battle of Chevy Chase), and, indeed, my dear parents, in the rapid alternations of its fortunes and the diversity of its incident, the game (to my mind) bears a striking resemblance to the accounts of that ever-memorable contest.

"I fear I must now relinquish my pen, as the time allotted for correspondence is fast waning to its close, and tea-time is approaching. Pray give my kindest remembrances to all my numerous friends and relatives, and accept my fondest love and affection for yourselves, and the various other members of the family circle.

"I am, I am rejoiced to say, in the enjoyment of excellent health, and, surrounded as I am by congenial companions, and employed in interesting and agreeable pursuits, it is superfluous to add that I am happy.

"And now, my dear parents, believe me, your dutiful and affectionate son, so and so."

The doctor finished his dictation with a roll in his voice, as much as to say: "I think that will strike your respective parents as a chaste and classical composition; I think so!"

But, unexceptionable as its tone and sentiments undoubtedly were, it was far from expressing the feelings of Mr. Bultitude. The rest accepted it not unwillingly as an escape from the fatigue of original composition, but to him the neat, well-balanced sentences seemed a hollow mockery. As he wrote down each successive phrase, he wondered what Dick would think of it, and, when at last it was finished, the precious hour had gone for another week!

In speechless disgust, but without protest, for his spirit was too broken by this last cruel disappointment, he had to fold, put into an envelope, and direct this most misleading letter under the doctor's superintending eye, which, of course, allowed him no chance of introducing a line or even a word to counteract the tone of self-satisfaction and contentment which breathed in every sentence of it.

He saw it stamped, and put into the postbag, and then his last gleam of hope flickered out; he must give up struggling against the Inevitable; he must resign himself to be educated, and perhaps flogged here, while Dick was filling his house with clowns and pantaloons, destroying his reputation and damaging his credit at home. Perhaps, in course of time, he would grow accustomed to it, and, meanwhile, he would be as careful as possible to do and say nothing to make himself remarkable in any way, by which means he trusted, at least, to avoid any fresh calamity.

And with this resolution he went to bed on Saturday night, feeling that this was a dreary finish to a most unpleasant week.

CHAPTER XI.

A DAY OF REST.

"There was a letter indeed to be intercepted by a man's father to do him good with him!"—*Every Man in His Humor.*

> "I cannot lose the thought yet of this letter,
> Sent to my son; nor leave t' admire the change
> Of manners, and the breeding of our youth
> Within the kingdom, since myself was one."—*Ibid.*

Sunday came—a day which was to begin a new week for Mr. Bultitude, and, of course, for the rest of the Christian world as well. Whether that week would be better or worse than the one which had just passed away he naturally could not tell; it could hardly be much worse.

But the Sunday itself, he anticipated—without, however, any very firm grounds for such an assumption—would be a day of brief but grateful respite; a day on which he might venture to claim much the same immunity as was enjoyed in the old days by the insolvent; a day, in short, which would glide slowly by with the rather drowsy solemnity peculiar to the British Sabbath, as observed by all truly respectable persons.

And yet that very Sunday, could he have foreseen it, was destined to be the most eventful day he had yet spent at Crichton House, where none had proved wanting in incident. During the next twelve hours he was to pass through every variety of unpleasant sensation. Embarrassment, suspense, fear, anxiety, dismay and terror, were to follow each other in rapid succession, and to wind up, strangely enough, with a delicious ecstasy of pure relief and happiness—a fatiguing programme for any middle-aged gentleman who had never cultivated his emotional faculties.

Let me try and tell you how this came about. The getting-up bell rang an hour later than on week days, but the boys were expected to prepare certain tasks suitable for the day before they rose. Mr. Bultitude found that he was required to learn by heart a hymn in which the rhymes "join" and "divine," "throne" and "crown," were so happily wedded that either might conform to the other—a graceful concession to individual taste which is not infrequent in this class of poetry. Trivial as such a task may seem in these days of school boards, it gave him infinite trouble and mental exertion, for he had not been called upon to commit anything of the kind to memory for many years, and after mastering that, there still remained a long chro-

nological list (the dates approximately computed) of the leading events before and immediately after the Deluge, which was to be repeated "without looking at the book."

While he was wrestling desperately with these—for he was determined, as I have said before, to do all in his power to keep himself out of trouble—Mrs. Grimstone, in her morning wrapper, paid a visit to the dormitories, and in spite of all Paul's attempts to excuse himself, insisted upon pomatuming his hair, an indignity which he felt acutely.

"When she knows who I really am," he thought, "she'll be sorry she made such a point of it. If there's one thing upon earth I loathe more than another, it's marrow-oil pomade!"

Then there was breakfast, at which Dr. Grimstone appeared, resplendent in glossy broadcloth, dazzling shirt-front and semi-clerical white tie, and after breakfast, an hour in the school-room, during which the boys (by the aid of repeated references to the text) wrote out "from memory" the hymn they had learned, while Paul managed somehow to stumble through his dates and events to the satisfaction of Mr. Tinkler, who, to increase his popularity, made a point of being as easily satisfied with such repetitions as he decently could.

After that came the order to prepare for church. There was a general rush to the little room with the shelves and band-boxes, where church books were procured, and great coats and tight kid gloves put on.

When they were almost ready the doctor came in, wearing his blandest and most paternal expression.

"Ah—it's a collection Sunday to-day, boys," he said. "Have you all got your threepenny-bits ready? I like to see my boys give cheerfully and liberally of their abundance. If anybody does not happen to have any small change, I can accommodate him if he comes to me."

And this he proceeded to do from a store he had with him of that most convenient coin—the chosen expression of a congregation's gratitude—the common silver threepence, for the school occupied a prominent position in the church, and had acquired a great reputation among the church wardens for the admirable uniformity with which one young gentleman after another "put into the plate;" and this reputation the doctor was naturally anxious that they should maintain.

I am sorry to say that Mr. Bultitude, fearing lest he should be asked if he had the required sum about him, and thus his penniless condition might be discovered and bring him trouble, got behind the door at the beginning of the money-changing transactions, and remained there till it was over; it seemed to him that it would be too paltry to be disgraced for want of three-pence.

Now, being thus completely furnished for their devotions the school formed in couples in the hall and filed solemnly out for the march to church.

Mr. Bultitude walked nearly last with Jolland, whose facile nature had almost forgotten his friend's shortcomings on the previous day. He kept up a perpetual flow of chatter, which, as he never stopped for an answer, permitted Paul to indulge his own thoughts unrestrained.

"Are you going to put your threepenny-bit in?" said Jolland; "I won't if you don't. Sometimes, you know, when the plate comes round, old Grim squints down the pews to see we don't shirk. Then I put in sixpence. Have you done your hymn? I do hate a hymn. What's the use of learning hymns? They won't mark you for them, you know, in any exam. I ever heard of, and it can't save you the expense of a hymn-book unless you learned all the hymns in it, and that would take you years. Oh, I say, look! there's young Mutlow and his governor and mater. I wonder what Mutlow's governor does? Mutlow says he's a 'gentleman' if you ask him, but I believe he lies. See that fly driving past? Mother Grim" (the irreverent youth always spoke of Mrs. Grimstone in this way) "and Dulcie are in it. I saw Dulcie look at you, Dick. It's a shame to treat her as you did yesterday. There's young Tom on the box; don't his ears stick out rummily? I wonder if the 'ugly family' will be at church to-day? You know the ugly family; all with their mouths open and their eyes goggling, like a jolly old row of pantomime heads. And oh, Dick, suppose Connie Davenant's people have changed their pew—that'll be a sell for you rather, won't it?"

"I don't understand you," said Mr. Bultitude, stiffly; "and, if you don't object, I prefer not to be called upon to talk just now."

"Oh, all right!" said Jolland; "there aren't so many fellows who will talk to you; but just as you please—I don't want to talk."

And so the pair walked on in silence; Jolland, with his nose in the air, determined that after this he really must cut his former friend, as the other fellows had done, since his devotion was appreciated so little, and Paul, watching the ascending double line of tall chimney-pot hats as they surged before him in regular movement, and feeling a dull wonder at finding himself setting out to church in such ill-assorted company.

They entered the church, and Paul was sent down to the extreme end of a pew next to the one reserved for the doctor and his family. Dulcie was sitting there already on the other side of the partition; but she gave no sign of having noticed his

arrival, being apparently absorbed in studying the rose-window over the altar.

He sat down in his corner with a sense of rest and almost comfort, though the seat was not a cushioned one. He had the inoffensive Kiffin for a neighbor, his chief tormenters were far away from him in one of the back pews, and here at least, he thought, no harm could come to him. He could allow himself safely to do what I am afraid he generally did do under the circumstances—snatch a few intermittent but sweet periods of dreamless slumber.

But, while the service was proceeding, Mr. Bultitude was suddenly horrified to observe that a young lady, who occupied a pew at right angles to and touching that in which he sat, was deliberately making furtive signals to him in a most unmistakable manner.

She was a decidedly pretty girl of about fifteen, with merry and daring blue eyes and curling golden hair, and was accompanied by two small brothers (who shared the same book, and dealt each other stealthy and vicious kicks throughout the service), and by her father, a stout, short-sighted old gentleman in gold spectacles, who was perpetually making the wrong responses in a loud and confident tone.

To be signaled to in a marked manner by a strange young lady of great personal attractions might be a coveted distinction to other schoolboys, but it simply gave Mr. Bultitude cold thrills.

"I suppose that's 'Connie Davenant,'" he thought, shocked beyond measure as she caught his eye and coughed demurely for about the fourth time. "A very forward young person! I think somebody ought to speak seriously to her father."

"Good gracious! she's writing something on the fly-leaf of her prayer-book," he said to himself, presently. "I hope she's not going to send it to *me*. I won't take it. She ought to be ashamed of herself!"

Miss Davenant was indeed busily engaged in penciling something on a blank sheet of paper; and, having finished, she folded it deftly into a cocked-hat, wrote a few words on the outside, and placed it between the leaves of her book.

Then, as the congregation rose for the Psalms, she gave a meaning glance at the blushing and scandalized Mr. Bultitude, and, by dexterous management of her prayer-book, shot the little cocked-hat, as if unconsciously, into the next pew.

By a very unfortunate miscalculation, however, the note missed its proper object, and, clearing the partition, fluttered deliberately down on the floor by Dulcie's feet.

Paul saw this with alarm; he knew that at all hazards he must get that miserable note into his own possession and destroy it.

It might have his name somewhere about it; it might seriously compromise him.

So he took advantage of the noise the congregation made in repeating a verse aloud (it was not a high church) to whisper to Dulcie: "Little Miss Grimstone, excuse me, but there's a—a note in the pew down by your feet. I believe it is intended for me."

Dulcie had seen the whole affair, and had been not a little puzzled by it, a clandestine correspondence being a new thing in her short experience; but she understood that in this golden-haired girl, her elder by several years, she saw her rival, for whom Dick had so basely abandoned her yesterday, and she was old enough to feel the slight and the sweetness of revenge.

So she held her head rather higher than usual, with her firm little chin projecting willfully, and waited for the next verse but one before retorting: "Little Master Bultitude, I know it is."

"Could you—can you manage to reach it?" whispered Paul, entreatingly.

"Yes," said Dulcie, "I could."

"Then will you—when they sit down?"

"No," said Dulcie, firmly, "I shan't."

The other girl, she noticed with satisfaction, had become aware of the situation and was evidently uneasy. She looked as imploringly as she dared at remorseless little Dulcie, as if appealing to her not to get her into trouble; but Dulcie bent her eyes obstinately on her book and would not see her.

If the letter had been addressed to any other boy in the school, she would have done her best to shield the culprits; but this she could not bring herself to do here. She found a malicious pleasure in remaining absolutely neutral, which, of course, was very wrong and ill-natured of her.

Mr. Bultitude began now to be seriously alarmed. The fatal paper must be seen by some one in the doctor's pew as soon as the congregation sat down again; and, if it reached the doctor's hands, it was impossible to say what misconstruction he might put upon it, or what terrible consequences might not follow.

He was innocent, perfectly innocent; but, though the consciousness of innocence is frequently a great consolation, he felt that, unless he could imbue the doctor with it as well, it would not save him from a flogging.

So he made one more desperate attempt to soften Dulcie's resolution: "Don't be a naughty little girl," he said, very injudiciously for his purpose; "I tell you I must have it. You'll get me into a terrible mess if you're not careful!"

But, although Dulcie had been extremely well brought up, I regret to say that the only answer she chose to make to this appeal was that slight contortion of the features which with a pret-

ty girl is euphemized as a "*moue*," and with a plain one is called "making a face." When he saw it he knew that all hope of changing her purpose must be abandoned.

Then they all sat down, and, as Paul had foreseen, there the white cocked-hat lay on the dark pew-carpet, hideously distinct, with *billet doux* in every fold of it!

It could only be a question of time now. The curate was reading the first lesson for the day, but Mr. Bultitude heard not a verse of it. He was waiting with bated breath for the blow to fall.

It fell at last. Dulcie, either with the malevolent idea of hastening the crisis, or (which I prefer to believe for my own part) finding that her ex lover's visible torments were too much for her desire of vengeance, was softly moving a heavy hassock toward the guilty note. The movement caught her mother's eye, and in an instant the compromising paper was in her watchful hands.

She read it with incredulous horror, and handed it at once to the doctor.

The golden-haired one saw it all without betraying herself by any outward confusion. She had probably had some experience in such matters, and felt tolerably certain of being able, at the worst, to manage the old gentleman in the gold spectacles. But she took an early opportunity of secretly conveying her contempt for the traitress Dulcie, who continued to meet her angry glances with the blandest unconsciousness.

Dr. Grimstone examined the cocked-hat through his double eyeglasses, with a heavy thunder-cloud gathering on his brows. When he had mastered it thoroughly, he bent forward and glared indignantly past his wife and daughter for at least half a minute into the pew where Mr. Bultitude was cowering, until he felt that he was coming all to pieces under the piercing gaze.

The service passed all too quickly after that. Paul sat down and stood up almost unconsciously with the rest; but for the first time in his life he could have wished the sermon many times longer.

The horror of his position quite petrified him. After all his prudent resolutions to keep out of mischief and to win the regard and confidence of his jailer by his good conduct, like the innocent convict in a melodrama, this came as nothing less than a catastrophe. He walked home in a truly dismal state of limp terror.

Fortunately for him, none of the others seemed to have noticed his misfortune, and Jolland made no further advances. But even the weather tended to increase his depression, for it was a bleak, cheerless day, with a bitter and searching wind sweeping the gritty roads where yesterday's rain was turned to

black ice in the ruts, and the sun shone with a dull coppery glitter that had no warmth or geniality about it.

The nearer they came to Crichton House the more abjectly miserable became Mr. Bultitude's state of mind. It was as much as he could do to crawl up the steps to the front door, and his knees positively clapped together when the doctor, who had driven home, met them in the hall and said, in a still, grave voice, "Bultitude, when you have taken off your coat, I want you in the study."

He was as long about taking off his coat as he dared, but at last he went trembling into the study, which he found empty. He remembered the room well, with its ebony-framed etchings on the walls, bookcases and blue china over the draped mantelpiece, even to a large case of elaborately carved Indian chessmen in bullock-carts and palanquins, on horses and elephants, which stood in the window-recess. It was the very room to which he had been shown when he first called about sending his son to the school. He had little thought then that the time would come when he would attend there for the purpose of being flogged; few things would have seemed less probable. Yet here he was.

But his train of thought was abruptly broken by the entrance of the doctor. He marched solemnly in, holding out the offending missive. "Look here, sir!" he said, shaking it angrily before Paul's eyes. "Look here! what do you mean by receiving a flippant communication like this in a sacred edifice? What do you mean by it?"

"I—I didn't receive it," said Paul, at his wit's end.

"Don't prevaricate to me, sir; you know well enough it was intended for you. Have the goodness to read it now, and tell me what you have to say for yourself!"

Paul read it. It was a silly little school-girl note, half slang, and half sentiment, signed only with the initials C. D. "Well, sir?" said the doctor.

"It's very forward and improper—very," said Paul; "but it's not my fault—I can't help it. I gave the girl no encouragement. I never saw her before in all my life!"

"To my own knowledge, Bultitude, she has sat in that pew regularly for a year."

"Very probably," said Paul, "but I don't notice these matters. I'm past that sort of thing, my dear sir."

"What is her name? Come, sir, you know that."

"Connie Davenant," said Paul, taken unawares by the suddenness of the question. "At least, I—I heard so to-day." He felt the imprudence of such an admission as soon as he had made it

"Very odd that you know her name if you never noticed her before," said the doctor.

"Jolland told me," said Paul.

"Ah, but it's odder still that she knows yours, for I perceive it is directed to you by name."

"It's easily explained, my dear sir," said Paul; "easily explained. I've no doubt she heard it somewhere. At least, I never told her; it is not likely. I do assure you I'm as much distressed and shocked by this affair as you can be yourself. I am indeed. I don't know what girls are coming to nowadays"

"Do you expect me to believe that you are perfectly innocent?" said the doctor.

"Yes, I do," said Mr. Bultitude. "I can't prevent fast young ladies from sending me notes. Why, she might have sent you one!"

"We won't go into hypothetical cases," said the doctor, not relishing the war being carried into his own country; "she happened to prefer you. But, although your virtuous indignation seems to me a trifle overdone, sir, I don't see my way clear to punishing you on the facts, especially as you tell me you never encouraged these—these overtures, and my Dulcie, I am bound to say, confirms your statement that it was all the other young lady's doing. But, if I had had any proof that you had begun or responded to her—hem—advances, nothing could have saved you from a severe flogging at the very least; so be careful for the future."

"Ah!" said Paul, rather feebly, quite overwhelmed by the narrowness of his escape. Then, with a desperate effort, he found courage to add: "May I—ah—take advantage of this—this restored cordiality, to—to—in fact, to make a brief personal explanation? It—it's what I've been trying to tell you for a long time, ever since I first came, only you never will hear me out. It's highly important. You've no notion how serious it is!"

"There's something about you this term, Richard Bultitude," said the doctor, slowly, "that I confess I don't understand. This obstinacy is unusual in a boy of your age, and if you really have a mystery it may be as well to have it out and have done with it. But I can't be annoyed with it now. Come to me after supper to-night, and I shall be willing to hear anything you have to say."

Paul was too overcome at this unexpected favor to speak his thanks. He got away as soon as he could. His path was smoothed at last!

That afternoon the boys, or all of them who had disposed of the work set them for the day, were sitting in the schoolroom,

after a somewhat chilly dinner of cold beef, cold tarts, and cold water, passing the time with that description of literature known as "Sunday reading."

And here, at the risk of being guilty of a digression, I must pause to record my admiration for this exceedingly happy form of compromise, which is, I think, peculiar to the British and, to a certain extent, the American nations.

It has many developments. From the mild transatlantic compound of cookery and camp-meetings, to the semi-novel, redeemed and chastened by an arrangement which sandwiches a sermon or a biblical lecture between each chapter of the story —a great convenience for the race of skippers.

But the crown and triumph of successful trimming must surely be looked for in the illustrated Sabbath magazines, in many of which there is so dexterous a combination of this world and the next that even a public analyst might find it difficult to resolve them.

Open any one of the monthly numbers, and the chances are you will find at one part a neat little doctrinal essay by a literary bishop; at another a paper upon "cockroaches and their habits" by an eminent savant; somewhere else, a description of foreign travel, done in a brilliant and wholly secular vein; and, farther on again, an article on æsthetic furniture—the balance of the number being devoted to installments of two thrilling novels by popular authors, whose theology is seldom their strongest point.

Oddly enough, too, when these very novels come out later in three-volume form, with the "mark of the beast" in the shape of a circulating library ticket upon them, they will be fortunate if they are not interdicted altogether by some of the serious families who take in the magazines as being "so suitable for Sundays."

It was the editor of one of these magazines, indeed, who is said, though I do not vouch for the truth of the story, to have implored the author, who was running a novel through his columns, to shift the date on which he had made his lovers meet from Saturday afternoon to "Sunday after church time," in deference to the susceptibilities of the subscribers.

Mr. Bultitude, at all events, had no reason to complain of the system. For in one of the bound volumes supplied to him he found a most interesting and delightfully unsectarian novel, which appealed to his tastes as a business man, for it was all about commerce and making fortunes by blockade-running; and, though he was no novel reader as a rule, his mind was so relieved and set at rest by the prospect of seeing the end of his troubles at last that he was able to occupy his mind with the fortunes of the hero.

He naturally detected technical errors here and there. But that pleased him, and he was becoming so deeply absorbed in the tale that he felt seriously annoyed when Chawner came softly up to the desk at which he was sitting, and sat down close to him, crossing his arms before him, and leaning forward upon them with his sallow face toward Paul.

"Dickie," he began, in a cautious, oily tone, "did I hear the doctor say before dinner that he would hear anything you have to tell him after supper? Did I?"

"I really can't say, sir," said Paul; "if your were near the key-hole at the time, very likely you did."

"The door was open," said Chawner, "and I was in the cloak-room, so I heard, and I want to know. What is it you're going to tell the doctor?"

"Mind your own business, sir," said Paul, sharply.

"It is my own business," said Chawner; "but I don't want to be told what you're going to tell him. I know."

"Good Heavens!" said Mr. Bultitude, annoyed to find his secret in possession of this boy of all others.

"Yes," repeated Chawner, "I know, and I tell you what—I won't have it!"

"Won't have it! and why?"

"Never mind why. Perhaps I don't choose that the doctor shall be told just yet; perhaps I mean to go up and tell him myself some other day. I want to have a little more fun out of it before I've done."

"But—but," said Paul, "you young ghoul, do you mean to say that all your care for is to see other people's sufferings?"

Chawner grinned maliciously. "Yes," he said, suavely, "it amuses me."

"And so," said Paul, "you want to hold me back a little longer—because it's so funny; and then, when you're quite tired of your sport, you'll go up and tell the doctor my—my unhappy story yourself, eh? No, my friend; I'd rather not tell him myself—but I'll be shot if I let *you* have a finger in it. I know my own interests better than that!"

"Don't get in a passion, Dickie," said Chawner; "it's Sunday. You'll have to let me go up instead of you—when I've frightened them a little more."

"Who do you mean by them, sir?" said Paul, growing puzzled.

"As if you didn't know! Oh, you're too clever for me, Dickie, I can see," sniggered Chawner.

"I tell you I don't know!" said Mr. Bultitude. "Look here, Chawner—your confounded name is Chawner, isn't it?—there's a mistake somewhere, I'm sure of it. Listen to me. I'm not going to tell the doctor what you think I am!"

"What do I think you are going to tell him?"

"I haven't the slightest idea; but, whatever it is, you're wrong."

"Ah, you're too clever, Dickie; you won't betray yourself; but other people want to pay Coker and Tipping out as well as you, and I say you must wait."

"I sha'n't say anything to affect any one but myself," said Paul; "if you know all about it, you must know that—it won't interfere with your amusement, that I can see."

"Yes, it will," said Chawner, irritably, "it will—you mayn't mean to tell of any one but yourself, but, directly Grimstone asks you questions, it all comes out. I know all about it. And, anyway, I forbid you to go up till I give you leave."

"And who the deuce are you?" said Mr. Bultitude, nettled at this assumption of authority. "How are you going to prevent me, may I ask?"

"S–sh! here's the doctor," whispered Chawner, hurriedly. "I'll tell you after tea. What am I doing out of my place, sir? Oh, I was only asking Bultitude what was the collect for to-day, sir. Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany? thank you, Bultitude."

And he glided back to his seat, leaving Paul in a state of vague uneasiness. Why did this fellow, with the infernal sly face and glib tongue, want to prevent him from righting himself with the world, and how could he possibly prevent him? It was absurd; he would take no notice of the young scoundrel—he would defy him.

But he could not banish the uneasy feeling; the cup had slipped so many times before at the critical moment that he could not be sure whose hand would be the next to jog his elbow. And so he went down to tea with renewed misgivings.

CHAPTER XII.

AGAINST TIME.

"There is a kind of Followers likewise, which are dangerous, being indeed Espials; which inquire the Secrets of the House and beare Tales of them."—*Bacon.*

"Then give me leave that I may turn the key,
That no man enter till my tale be done."

Very possibly Chawner's interference in Mr. Bultitude's private affairs has surprised others besides the victim of it; but the

fact is that there was a most unfortunate misunderstanding between them from the very first, which prevented the one from seeing, the other from explaining, the real state of the case.

Chawner, of course, no more guessed Paul's true name and nature than any one else who had come in contact with him in his impenetrable disguise, and his motive for attempting to prevent an interview with the doctor can only, I fear, be explained by another slight digression.

The doctor, from a deep sense of his responsibility for the morals of those under his care, was perhaps a trifle over-anxious to clear his moral garden of every noxious weed, and too constant in his vigilant efforts to detect the growing shoot of evil from the moment it showed above the surface.

As he could not be everywhere, however, it is evident that many offences, trivial and otherwise, must have remained unsuspected and unpunished, but for a theory which he had originated and took great pains to propagate among his pupils.

The theory was that every right-minded boy ought to feel himself in such a fiduciary position toward his master that it became a positive duty to acquaint him with any delinquencies he might happen to observe among his fellows; and if, at the same time, he was oppressed by a secret burden on his own conscience, it was understood that he might hope that the joint revelation would go far to mitigate his own punishment.

It is doubtful whether this system, though I believe it is found successful in Jesuit colleges, can be usefully applied to English boys; whether it may not produce a habit of mutual distrust and suspicion, and a tone the reverse of healthy.

For myself, I am inclined to think that a schoolmaster will find it better in the long run, for both the character and morals of his school, if he is not too anxious to play the detective, and refrains from encouraging the more weak-minded or cowardly boys to save themselves by turning "schoolmaster's evidence."

Dr. Grimstone thought otherwise; but it must be allowed that the system, as in vogue at Crichton House, did not work well.

There were boys, of course, who took a sturdier view of their own rights and duties, and despised the tale-bearers as they deserved; there were others, also, too timid and too dependent on the good opinion of others to risk the loss of it by becoming informers; but there were always one or two whose consciences were unequal to the burden of their neighbor's sin, and could only be relieved by frank and full confession.

Unhappily they had, as a general rule, contributed largely to

the sum of guilt themselves, and did not resort to disclosure until detection seemed reasonably imminent.

Chawner was the leader of this conscientious band; he reveled in the system. It gave him the means at once of gratifying the almost universal love of power and of indulging a catlike passion for playing with the feelings of others, which, it is to be hoped, is more uncommon.

He knew he was not popular, but he could procure most of the incidents of popularity; he could have his little court of cringing toadies; he could levy his tribute of conciliatory presents, and vent many private spites and hatreds into the bargain —and he generally did.

Having himself a tendency to acts of sly disobedience, he found it a congenial pastime to set the fashion from time to time in some one of the peccadilloes to which boyhood is prone, and to which the doctor's somewhat restrictive code added a large number, and, as soon as he saw a sufficient number of his companions satisfactorily implicated, his opportunity came.

He would take the chief culprits aside, and profess, in strict confidence, certain qualms of conscience which he feared could only be appeased by unburdening his guilt-laden soul.

To this none would have had any right to object—had it not necessarily, or at least from Chawner's point of view, involved a full, true, and particular account of the misdoings of each and every one; and, consequently, for some time after these professions of misgivings, Chawner would be surrounded by a little crowd of anxiously obsequious friends, all trying hard to overcome his scruples or persuade him, at least, to omit their names from his revelations.

Sometimes he would affect to be convinced by their arguments and send them away reassured; at others his scruples would return in an aggravated form; and so he would keep them on tenter-hooks of suspense for days and weeks, until he was tired of the amusement—for this practicing on the fears of weaker natures is a horribly keen delight to some—or until some desperate little dog, unable to bear his torture any longer, would threaten to give himself up and make an end of it.

Then Chawner, to do him justice, always relieved him from so disagreeable a necessity, and would go softly into the doctor's study, and, in a subdued and repentant tone, pour out his general confession for the public good.

Probably the doctor did not altogether respect the instruments he saw fit to use in this way; some would have declined to hear the informer out, flogged him well, and forgotten it; but Dr. Grimstone—though he was hardly likely to be impressed by these exhibitions of noble candor, and did not fail to see that the prospect of obtaining better terms for the penitent himself

had something to do with them—yet encouraged the system as a matter of policy, went thoroughly into the whole affair, and made it the cause of an explosion which he considered would clear the moral atmosphere for some time to come.

I hope that, after this explanation, Chawner's opposition to Mr. Bultitude's plans will be better understood.

After tea, he made Paul a little sign to follow him, and the two went out together into the little glass-house beyond the schoolroom; it was dark, but there was light enough from the room inside for them to see each other's face.

"Now, sir," began Paul, with dignity, when he had closed the glass door behind him, "perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me how you mean to prevent me from seeing Dr. Grimstone, and telling him—telling him what I have to tell him?"

"I'll tell you, Dickie," said Chawner, with an evil smirk. "You shall know soon enough."

"Don't stand grinning at me like that, sir," said the angry Mr. Bultitude; "say it out at once; it will make no difference to me, I give you warning!"

"Oh, yes it will, though. I think it will. Wait. I heard all you said to Grimstone in the study to-day about that girl—Connie Davenant, you know."

"I don't care; I am innocent. I have nothing to reproach myself with."

"What a liar you are!" said Chawner, more in admiration than rebuke. "You told him you never gave her any encouragement, didn't you? And he said, if he ever found you had, nothing could save you from a licking, didn't he?"

"He did," said Paul; "he was quite right from his point of view—what then?"

"Why this," said Chawner: "Do you remember giving Jolland, the last Sunday of last term, a note for that very girl?"

"I never did!" said poor Mr. Bultitude, "I never saw the wretched girl before."

"Ah!" said Chawner, "but I've got the note in my pocket! Jolland was seedy, and asked me to take it for you, and I read it, and it was so nicely written that I thought I should like to keep it myself, and so I did—and here it is!"

And he drew out with great caution a piece of crumpled paper and showed it to the horrified old gentleman. "Don't snatch . . . it's rude; there it is, you see: "My dear Connie' . . . 'yours ever, Dick Bultitude.' No, you don't come any nearer . . . there, now it's safe . . . Now what do you mean to do?"

"I—I don't know," said Paul, feeling absolutely checkmated. "Give me time."

"I tell you what I mean to do; I shall keep my eye on you,

and, directly I see you making ready to go to Grimstone, I shall get up first and take him this . . . then you'll be done for. You'd better give in, really, Dickie!"

The note was too evidently genuine. Dick must have written it (as a matter of fact he had; in a moment of pique, no doubt, at some caprice of his real enslaver Dulcie's—but his fickleness brought fatal results on his poor father's undeserving head); if this diabolical Chawner carried out his threats, he would indeed be "done for;" he did not yet fully understand the other's motive, but he thought that he feared lest Paul, in declaring his own sorrows, might also accuse Tipping and Coker of acts of cruelty and oppression, which Chawner proposed to denounce himself at some more convenient opportunity he hesitated painfully.

"Well," said Chawner, "make up your mind; are you going to tell him or not?"

"I must!" said Paul, hoarsely. "I promise you I shall not bring any other names in . . . I don't want to . . . I only want to save myself—and I can't stand it any longer. Why should you stand between me and my rights in this currish way? I didn't know there were boys like you in this world, sir; you're a young monster!"

"I don't mean you to tell the doctor anything at all," said Chawner. "I shall do what I said."

"Then do your worst!" cried Paul, stung to defiance.

"Very well, then," returned Chawner, meekly, "I will—and we'll see who wins!"

And they went back to the schoolroom again, where Mr. Bultitude, boiling with rage and seriously alarmed as well, tried to sit down and appear as if nothing had happened.

Chawner sat down too, in a place from which he could see all Paul's movements, and they both watched one another anxiously from the corners of their eyes till the doctor came in.

"It's a foggy evening," he said as he entered; "the younger boys had better stay in. Chawner, you and the rest of the first form can go to church; get ready at once."

Paul's heart leaped with triumph; with his enemy out of the way, he could carry out his purpose unhindered. The same thing apparently occurred to Chawner, for he said, mildly, "Please, sir, may Richard Bultitude come too?"

"Can't Bultitude ask leave for himself?" said the doctor.

"I, sir!" said the horrified Paul, "it's a mistake—I don't want to go. I—I don't feel very well this evening!"

"Then you see, Chawner, you misunderstood him. By the way, Bultitude, there was something you were to tell me, I think!"

Chawner's small, glittering eyes were fixed on Paul menacing-

ly, as he managed to stammer that he did want to say something in private.

"Very well, I am going out to see a friend for an hour or so; when I come back I will hear," and he left the room abruptly.

Chawner would very probably have petitioned to stay in that evening as well, had he had time and presence of mind to do so; as it was, he was obliged to go away and get ready for church; but when his preparations were made he came back to Paul, and leaning over him said, with an unpleasant scowl, "If I get back in time, Bultitude, we'll see whether you balk me quite so easily. If I come back and find you've done it—I shall take in that letter!"

"You may do what you please, then," said Paul, in a high state of irritation; "I shall be well out of your reach by that time. Now have the goodness to take yourself off."

As he went, Mr. Bultitude thought: "I never in all my life saw such a fellow as that, never! It would give me real pleasure to hire some one to kick him."

The evening passed quietly; the boys left at home sat in their places, reading or pretending to read. Mr. Blinkhorn, left in charge of them, was at his table in the corner, noting up his diary. Paul was free for a time to think over his position.

At first he was calm and triumphant; his dearest hopes, his long-wished for opportunity of a fair and unprejudiced hearing, were at last to be fulfilled; Chawner was well out of the way for the best part of two hours—the doctor was very unlikely to be detained nearly so long over one call. His one anxiety was lest he might not be able, after all, to explain himself in a thoroughly effective manner; he planned out a little scheme for doing this.

He must begin gradually, of course, so as not to alarm the shoolmaster or raise doubts of his sincerity, or, worse still, his sanity. Perhaps a slight glance at instances of extraordinary interventions of the supernatural from the earliest times, tending to show the extreme probability of their survival on rare occasions even to the present day, might be a prudent and cautious introduction to the subject—only he could not think of any, and, after all, it might weary the doctor.

He would start somewhat in this manner: "You cannot, my dear sir, have failed to observe, since our meeting this year, a certain difference in my manner and bearing"—one's projected speeches are somehow generally couched in finer language than, when it comes to the point, the tongue can be prevailed upon to utter. Mr. Bultitude learned this opening sentence by heart; he thought it taking and neat—the sort of thing to fix his hearer's attention from the first.

After that, he found it difficult to get any further; he knew himself that all he was about to describe was plain, unvarnished

fact—but how would it strike on a stranger's ear? he found himself seeking ways in which to tone down the glaring improbability of the thing as much as possible, but in vain. "I don't know how I shall ever get it all out," he told himself at last; "if I think about it much longer I shall begin to disbelieve in it myself."

Here Biddlecomb came up in a confidential manner and sat down by Paul. "Dick," he began, in rather a trembling voice, "did I hear the doctor say something about your having something to tell him?"

"Oh, Lord, here's another of them now!" thought Paul. "You are right, young sir," he said; "have you any objection? mention it, you know, if you have, pray mention it. It's a matter of life and death to me, but if you at all disapprove, of course that ought to be final."

"No, but," protested Biddlecomb, "I—I daresay I've not treated you very well lately, I——"

"You were kind enough to suggest several very uncommonly unpleasant ways of annoying me, sir," said Paul, resentfully, "if you mean that. You've kicked me more than once, and your handkerchief, unless I am very much mistaken, had the biggest and the hardest knot in it yesterday. If that gives you the right to interfere and dictate to me now, like your amiable friend, Mr. Chawner, I suppose you have it."

"Now you're angry," said Biddlecomb, humbly; "I don't wonder at it. I've behaved like a cad, I know, but, and this is what I wanted to say, I was sorry for you all the time."

"That's very comforting," said Paul, dryly; "thank you; I'm vastly obliged to you."

"I was, though," said Biddlebomb; "I—I was led away by the other fellows—I always liked you, you know, Bultitude."

"You've a very odd way of showing your affection," remarked Mr. Bultitude; "but go on; let me hear all you have to say."

"It isn't much," said Biddlecomb, quite broken down; "only don't sneak of me this time, Dick; let me off, there's a good fellow. I'll stick up for you after this, I will really. You used not to be a fellow for sneaking once. I'ts caddish to sneak."

"Don't be alarmed, my good friend," said Paul; "I won't poach on that excellent young man Chawner's preserves. What I am going to tell the doctor has nothing to do with you."

"On your honor?" said Biddlecomb, eagerly.

"Yes," said Paul, testily, "on my honor. Now, perhaps, you'll let me alone. No, I won't shake hands, sir. I've had to accept your kicks, but I don't want your friendship."

Biddlecomb went off, looking slightly ashamed of himself, but visibly relieved from a haunting fear. "Thank goodness!"

thought Paul, "he wasn't as obstinate as the other fellow. What a set they are! I knew it; there's another boy coming up now!"

And, indeed, one boy after another came up in the same way as Biddlecomb had done, some cringing more than others, but all vowing that they had never intended to do any harm, and entreating him to change his mind about complaining of his ill-treatment. They brought little offerings to propitiate him and prove the depth of their unaltered regard—pencil-cases, pocket-knives, and so forth—until they drove Paul nearly to desperation. However, he succeeded in dispelling their fears after some hot arguments, and had just sent away the last suppliant, when he saw Jolland, too, rise and come toward him.

Jolland leaned across Paul's desk with folded arms and looked him full in the face with his shallow, light-green eyes. "I don't know what you've said to all those chaps," he began; "they've come back looking precious glum, but they won't tell me what you've said." (Mr. Bultitude had in satisfying their alarm taken care to let them know his private opinion of them, which was not flattering.) "But I've got something to say to you, and it's this: I never thought you would quite come down to this sort of thing!"

"What sort of thing?" said Paul, who was beginning to have enough of it.

"Why, going up and letting on against all of us—it's mean, you know. If you have got bashed about pretty well since you came back, it's been all your own fault, and you know it. Last term you got on well enough—this time you began to be queer and nasty the very first day you came. I thought it was one of your larks at first, but I don't know what it is now, and I don't care. I stood up for you as long as I could, till you acted like a funk yesterday Then I took my share in lamming you, and I'd do it again. But, if you are cad enough to pay us all out in this way, I'll have no more to do with you—mind that. That's all I came to say."

This was an unpalatable way of putting things, but Paul could not help seeing that there was some truth in it. Jolland had been kind to him, too, in a careless sort of way, and at some cost to himself; so it was with more mildness than temper that he answered him.

"You're on the wrong tack, my boy, the wrong tack. I've no wish to tell tales of any one, as I've been trying to explain to your friends. There's something the matter with me which you wouldn't understand if I told you."

"Oh, I didn't know," said Jolland, mollified; "if it's only physic you want."

"Whatever it is," said Paul, "not caring to undeceive him,

"it won't affect you or any one here, but myself. You're not a bad young fellow, I believe. I don't want to get you into trouble, sir; you don't want much assistance, I'm afraid, in that department. So be off, like a good fellow, and leave me in peace."

All these interviews had taken time. He was alarmed on looking at the clock to see that it was nearly eight; the doctor was a long time over that call. For the first time he began to feel uneasy; he made hurried mental calculations as to the possibility of the doctor or Chawner being the first to return.

The walk to church took about twenty minutes; say the service took an hour, allowing for the return, he might expect Chawner by about half-past eight; it was striking the hour now —half an hour only in which he could hope for any favorable result from the interview!

For he saw this plainly, that if Chawner were once permitted to get the doctor's ear first and show him that infamous love-note, no explanation of his (even if he had nerve to make it then, which he doubted) could possibly seem anything more than a desperate and far-fetched excuse; if he could anticipate Chawner, on the other hand, and once convince the doctor of the truth of his story, the informer's malice would fall flat.

And still the long hand went rapidly on, as Mr. Bultitude sat staring stupidly at it with a faint sick feeling—it had passed the quarter now—why did the doctor delay in this unwarrantable manner? What a farce social civilities were—if he had allowed himself to be prevailed on to stay to supper! Twenty minutes past; Chawner and the others might return at any moment—a ring at the bell; they were there! all was over now—no, he was saved, there was Dr. Grimstone's voice in the hall—what an unconscionable time he was taking off his great coat and gloves!

But all comes to the man who waits. In another moment the doctor looked in, singled out Mr. Bultitude with a sharp glance, and a "Now, Bultitude, I will hear you!" and led the way to his study.

Paul staggered rather than walked after him; as usual at the critical moment, his carefully prepared opening had deserted him—his head felt heavy and crowded—he wanted to run away, but forced himself to overcome such a suicidal proceeding and follow to the study.

There was a lighted reading-lamp with a green glass shade upon the table. The doctor sat down by it in an arm-chair by the fire, crossed his legs, and joined the tops of his fingers together. "Now, Bultitude," he said again.

"Might I—might I sit down?" said poor Mr. Bultitude, in a thick voice; it was all that occured to him to say.

"Sit, by all means," said the doctor, blandly.

So Paul drew a chair opposite the doctor and sat down. He tried desperately to clear his head and throat and begin; but the only distinct thought in his mind then was that the green lamp-shade lent a particularly ghastly hue to the doctor's face.

"Take your time, Bultitude," said the latter, after a long minute, in which a little skeleton clock on the mantelpiece ticked loudly; "there's no hurry, my boy."

But this only reminded Paul that there was every need for hurry. Chawner might come in, and follow him here, unless he made haste.

Still, he could only say: "You see me in a very agitated state, Dr. Grimstone—a very agitated state, sir.

The doctor gave a short, dry cough. "Well, Bultitude," he said.

"The fact is, sir, I'm in a most unfortunate position, and—and the worst of it is, I don't know how to begin." Here he made another dead stop, while the doctor raised his heavy eyebrows, and looked at the clock.

"Do you see any prospect of finding yourself able to begin soon?" he inquired, at last, with rather suspicious suavity. "Perhaps if you came to me later on——"

"Not for the world!" said Paul, in a highly nervous condition. "I shall begin very soon, doctor, I shall begin directly. Mine is such a very singular case; it's difficult, as you see, to—to open it!"

"Have you anything on your mind?" asked the doctor, suddenly.

Paul could hear steps and voices in the adjoining cloak-room —the churchgoers had returned. "Yes—no!" he answered, losing his head completely now.

"That's a somewhat extraordinary, not to say an ambiuous reply," said the doctor; "what am I to understand by——"

There was a rap at the door. Paul started to his feet in a panic. "Don't let him in!" he shrieked, finding his voice at last. "Hear me first—you shall hear me first! Say that other rascal is not to come in. He wants to ruin me!"

"I was going to say I was engaged," said the doctor; "but there's something under this I must understand. Come in, whoever you are."

And the door opened softly, and Chawner stepped meekly in; he was rather pale, and breathed hard, but was otherwise quite composed.

"Now, then, Chawner," said the doctor, impatiently, "what is it? Have you something on your mind, too?"

"Please, sir," said Chawner, "has Bultitude told you anything yet?"

"No; why? Hold your tongue, Bultitude. I shall hear Chawner now—not you!"

"Because, sir," explained Chawner, "he knew I had made up my mind to tell you something I thought you ought to know about him, and so he threatened to come first and tell some falsehood (I'm sure I don't know what) about me, sir. I think I ought to be here too."

"It's a lie!" shouted Paul. "What a villain that boy is! Don't believe a word he says, Dr. Grimstone; it's all false—all!"

"This is very suspicious," said the doctor; "if your conscience were good, Bultitude, you could have no object in preventing me from hearing Chawner. Chawner, in spite of some obvious defects in his character," he went on, with a gulp (he never could quite overcome a repulsion to the boy), "is, on the whole, a right-minded and, ah, conscientious boy. I hear Chawner first."

"Then, sir, if you please," said Chawner, with an odious side smirk of triumph at Paul, who, quite crushed by the horror of the situation, had collapsed feebly on his chair again, "I thought it was my duty to let you see this. I found it to-day in Bultitude's prayer-book, sir." And he handed Dick's unlucky scrawl to the doctor, who took it to the lamp and read it hurriedly through.

After that there was a terrible moment of dead silence; then the doctor looked up and said, shortly: "You did well to tell me of this, Chawner; you may go now."

When they were alone once more he turned upon the speechless Paul with furious scorn and indignation. "Contemptible liar and hypocrite," he thundered, pacing restlessly up and down the room in his excitement, till Paul felt like Daniel, without his sense of security, "you are unmasked—unmasked, sir! You led me to believe that you were as much shocked and pained at this girl's venturing to write to you as I could be myself. You called it, quite correctly, 'forward and improper;' you pretended you had never given her the least encouragement—had not heard her name even—till to day. And here is a note, written, as I should imagine, some time since, in which you address her as 'Connie Davenant,' and have the impudence to admire the hat she wore the Sunday before! I shudder, sir, to think of such duplicity, such precocious and shameless depravity. It astounds me. It deprives me of all power to think!"

Paul made some faint and inarticulate remark about being a family man—always most particular, and so forth; luckily it passed unheard.

"What shall I do with you?" continued the doctor; "how shall I punish such monstrous misconduct?"

"Don't ask *me*, sir," said Paul, desperately—"only, for Heaven's sake, get it over as soon as possible."

"If I linger, sir," retorted the doctor, "it is because I have grave doubts as to whether your offense can be expiated by a mere flogging—whether that is not altogether too light a retribution."

"He can't want to torture me," thought Paul.

"Yes," said the doctor again, "the doubt has prevailed. On a mind so hardened, the cane would leave no lasting impression. I cannot allow your innocent companions to run the risk of contamination from your society. I must not permit this serpent to glide uncrushed, this cockatrice to practice his epistolary wiles, within my peaceful fold. My mind is made up—at whatever cost to myself—however it may distress and grieve your good father, who is so pathetically anxious for you to do him credit, sir. I must do my duty to the parents of the boys intrusted to my care. I shall not flog you, sir, for I feel it would be useless; I shall expel you.'

"What!" Paul leaped up incredulous. "Expel me? Do I hear you aright, Dr. Grimstone? Say it again—you will expel me?"

"I have said it," the doctor said, sternly; "no expostulation can move me now" (as if Mr. Bultitude was likely to expostulate!). "Mrs. Grimstone will see that your boxes are packed the first thing to-morrow morning, and I shall take you myself to the station, and consign you to the home you have covered with blushes and shame, by the 9.15 train, and I shall write a letter to-night explaining the causes for your dismissal."

Mr. Bultitude covered his face with his hand, to hide, not his shame and distress, but his indecent rapture. It seemed almost too good to be true! He saw himself about to be provided with every means of reaching home in comfort and safety. He need dread no pursuit now. There was no chance, either, of his being forced to return to the prison-house; the doctor's letter would convince even Dick of the impossibility of that. And, best of all, this magnificent stroke of good luck had been obtained without the ignominy and pain of a flogging, without even the unpleasant necessity of telling his strange secret.

But (having gained some experience during his short stay at the school) he had the duplicity to pretend to sob bitterly.

"But one night more, sir," continued the doctor, "shall you pass beneath this roof, and that apart from your fellows. You will occupy the spare bedroom until the morning, when you quit the school in disgrace—forever."

I said in another chapter that this Sunday would find Paul,

at its close, after a trying course of emotions, in a state of delicious ecstasy of pure relief and happiness—and really that scarcely seems too strong an expression for his feelings.

When he found himself locked securely into a comfortable, warm bedroom, with curtains and a carpet in it, safe from the persecutions of all those terrible boys, and when he remembered that this was actually the last night of his stay here—that he would certainly see his own home before noon next day—the reaction was so powerful that he could not refrain from skipping and leaping about the room in a kind of hysterical gayety.

And as he laid his head down on a yielding lavender-scented pillow, his thoughts went back without a pang to the varied events of the day; they had been painful, very painful, but it was well worth while to have gone through them to appreciate fully the delightful intensity of the contrast. He freely forgave all his tormentors, even Chawner, for had not Chawner procured his release? and he closed his eyes at last with a smile of Sybaritic satisfactlon and gentle longing for the Monday's dawn to break.

And yet some, after his experiences, would have had their misgivings.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RESPITE.

"Discipularum inter jubeo plorare cathedras."

Blithe and gay was Mr. Bultitude when he opened his eyes on Monday morning and realized his incredible good fortune; in a few hours he would be traveling safely and comfortably home, with every facility for regaining his rights. He chuckled—though his sense of humor was not large—he chuckled, as he lay snugly in bed, to think of Dick's discomfiture on seeing him return so unexpectedly; he began to put it down, quite unwarrantably, to his own cleverness, as having conceived and executed such a stroke of genius as procuring his own expulsion.

He remained in bed until long after the getting-up bell had rung, feeling that his position insured him perfect impunity in this, and when he rose at length it was in high spirits, and he dressed himself with a growing toleration for things in general,

very unlike his ordinary frame of mind. When he had finished his toilet, the doctor entered the room.

"Bultitude," he said, gravely, "before sending you from us, I should like to hear from your own lips that you are not altogether without contrition for your conduct."

Mr. Bultitude considered that such an acknowledgment could not possibly do any harm, so he said—as, indeed, he might with perfect truth—that "he very much regretted what had passed."

"I am glad to hear that," said the doctor, more briskly, "very glad; it relieves me from a very painful responsibility. It may not impossibly induce me to take a more lenient view of your case."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Bultitude, feeling very uncomfortable all at once.

"Yes; it is a serious step to ruin a boy's career at its outset by unnecessary harshness. Nothing, of course, can palliate the extreme baseness of your behavior. Still, from certain faint indications in your character of nobler things, I do not despair even yet (after you have received a public lesson at my hands, which you will never forget) of rearing you to become an ornament to the society in which it will be your lot to move. I will not give up in despair—I will persevere a little longer."

"Thank you!" Paul faltered, with a sudden sinking sensation.

"Mrs. Grimstone, too," said the doctor, "has been interceding for you; she has represented to me that a public expression of my view of your conduct, together with a sharp, severe dose of physical pain, would be more likely to effect a radical improvement in your character, and to soften your perverted heart, than if I sent you away in open disgrace, without giving you an opportunity of showing a desire to amend."

"It's—very kind of Mrs. Grimstone," said Paul, faintly.

"Then I hope you will show your appreciation of her kindness. Yes, I will not expel you. I will give you one more chance to retrieve your lost reputation. But, for your own sake, and as a public warning, I shall take notice of your offense in public. I shall visit it upon you by a sound flogging before the whole school at eleven o'clock. You need not come down till then; your breakfast will be sent up to you."

Paul made a frantic attempt to dissuade him from his terrible determination. "Dr. Grimstone," he said, "I—I should much prefer being expelled, if it is all the same to you."

"It is not all the same to me," said the doctor. "This is mere pride and obstinacy, Bultitude; I should do wrong to take any notice of it."

"I—I tell you I have great objection to—to being flogged,"

said Paul, eagerly; "it wouldn't improve me at all; it would harden me, sir—harden me. I—I cannot allow you to flog me, Dr. Grimstone. I have strong prejudices against the system of corporal punishment. I object to it on principle. Expulsion would make me quite a different being; I assure you; it would reform me—save me—it would indeed."

"So, to escape a little personal inconvenience, you would be content to bring sorrow upon your worthy father's gray head, would you, sir?" said the doctor; "I shall not oblige you in this. Nor, I may add, will your cowardice induce me to spare you in your coming chastisement. I leave you, sir; we shall meet again at eleven!"

And he stalked out of the room. Perhaps, though he did not admit this even to himself, there were more considerations for commuting the sentence of expulsion than those he had mentioned. Boys are not often expelled from private schools, except for especially heinous offenses, and in this case there was no real reason why the doctor should be Quixotic enough to throw up a portion of his income—particularly if he could produce as great a moral effect by other means.

But his clemency was too much for Mr. Bultitude; he threw himself on the bed and raved at the hideous fate in store for him; ten short minutes ago, and he had been so happy—so certain of release—and now, not only was he as far from all hope of escape as ever, but he had the certainty before him of a sound flogging in less than two hours!

Just after something has befallen us which, for good or ill, will make a great change in our lives, what a totally new aspect the common every-day things about us are apt to wear—the book we were reading, the letter we had begun, the picture we knew—what a new and tender attraction they may have for us, or what a grim and terrible irony!

Something of this Paul felt dimly, as he finished dressing, in a dazed, unconscious manner. The comfortable bedroom, with its delicately-toned wall-paper and flowery *crétonnes*, had become altogether hateful in his eyes now. Instead of feeling grateful (as he surely ought to have been) for the one night of perfect security and comfort he had passed there, he only loathed it for the delusive peace it had brought him.

There was a gentle tap at the door, and Dulcie came in, bearing a tray with his breakfast, and looking like a little royalist bearing food to a fugitive cavalier; though Paul did not quite carry out his share of the simile.

"There!" she said, almost cheerfully, "I got mamma to let me take up your breakfast; and there's an egg for you, and muffins."

Mr. Bultitude sat on a chair and groaned.

"You might say 'Thank you,'" said Dulcie, pouting. "That other girl wouldn't have brought you up much breakfast if she'd been in my place. I was going to tell you that I'd forgiven you, because very likely you never meant her to write to you" (Dulcie had not been told the sequel to the Davenant episode, which was quite as well for Paul). "But you don't seem to care whether I do or not."

"I feel so miserable!" sighed Paul.

"Then you must drink some coffee," prescribed Dulcie, decidedly; "and you must eat some breakfast. I brought an egg on purpose; it's so strengthening, you know."

"Don't!" cried Paul, with a short howl of distress at this suggestion. "Don't talk about the—the flogging; I can't bear it."

"But it's not papa's new cane, you know, Dick," said Dulcie, consolingly. "I've hidden that; it's only the old one, and you always said that didn't hurt so very much, after a little while. It isn't as if it was the horsewhip, either. Papa lost that out riding in the holidays."

"Oh, the horsewhip's worse, is it?" said Paul, with a sickly smile.

"Tom says so," said Dulcie. "After all, Dick, it will be all over in five minutes, or, perhaps, a little longer, and I do think you oughtn't to mind that so much, now, after mamma and I have begged you off from being expelled. We might never have seen one another again, Dick!"

"You begged me off!" cried Paul.

"Yes," said Dulcie; "papa wouldn't change his mind for ever so long—till I coaxed him. I couldn't bear to let you go."

"You've done a very cruel thing," said Paul. "For such a little girl as you are, you've done an immense amount of mischief. But for you, that letter would not have been found out. You need not have spoiled my only chance of getting out of this horrible place!"

Dulcie set down the tray, and, putting her hands behind her, leaned against a corner of a wardrobe.

"And is that all you say to me?" she said, with a little tremble in her voice.

"That is all," said Paul. "I've no doubt you meant well, but you shouldn't have interfered. All this has come upon me through that. Take away the breakfast. It makes me ill even to look at it."

Dulcie shook out her long brown hair, and clinched her pretty white fist in an undeniable passion, for she had something of her father's hot temper when roused. "Very well, then," she said, moving with great dignity toward the door. "I'm very sorry I ever did interfere. I wish I'd let you be sent home to

your papa, and see what he'd do to you. But I'll never, never interfere one bit with you again. I won't say one single word to you any more. . . . I'll never even look at you if you want me to ever so much. . . . I shall tell Tipping he can hit you as much as ever he likes, and I shall show Tom where I put the new cane—and I only hope it will hurt!" And with this parting shot she was gone.

Mr. Bultitude wandered disconsolately about the upper part of the house after this, not daring to go down, and not able to remain in any one place. The maids who came up to make the beds looked at him with pitiful interest, but he was too proud to implore help from them. To hide would only make matters worse, for, as he had not a penny in his pocket, and no probability of being able to borrow one, he must remain in the house till hunger forced him from his hiding-place—supposing they did not hunt him out long before that time.

The shouts of the boys in the playground during their half-hour's play had long since died away; he heard the clock in the hall strike eleven—time for him to seek his awful rendezvous. The doctor had not forgotten him, he found, for presently the butler ceremoniously announced that the doctor "would see him now, if he pleased."

He stumbled down-stairs in a half-unconscious condition, the butler threw open the two doors which led to the schoolroom, and Paul tottered in, more dead than alive with shame and fear.

The whole school were at their places, with no books before them, and arranged as if to hear a lecture. Mr. Blinkhorn alone was absent, for, not liking these exhibitions, he had taken an opportunity of slipping out into the playground, round which he was now solemnly trotting at the "double," with elbows squared and head up, an exercise which he said was an excellent thing for the back and lungs. He had a habit of suddenly leaving the class he was taking, to indulge in it for a few minutes, returning breathless but refreshed.

Mr. Tinkler was at his seat, wearing that faint grin on his face with which one prepares to see a pig killed or a bull-fight, and all the boys fixed their eyes expectantly on Mr. Bultitude as he appeared at the doorway.

"Stand there, sir," said the doctor, who was standing at his writing-table in an attitude; "out there in the middle, where your school-fellows can see you."

Paul obeyed, and stood where he was told, looking, as he felt, absolutely boneless.

"Some of those here," began the doctor, in an impressive bass, "may wonder why I have called you all together on this, the first day of the week; most of those who reside under my roof

are acquainted with, and I trust execrate, the miserable cause of my doing so.

"If there is one virtue which I have striven to implant more than any other in your breasts," he continued, "it is the cultivation of a modest and becoming reserve in your intercourse with those of the opposite sex.

"With the majority I have, I hope, been successful, and it is as painful for me to tell as for you to hear, that there exists in your midst a youthful reprobate, trained in all the arts of ensnaring the vagrant fancies of innocent but giddy girlhood.

"See him as he cowers there before your gaze, in all the bared hideousness of his moral depravity" (the doctor, on occasions like these, never spared his best epithets, and Paul soon began to feel himself a very villain); "a libertine, young in years, but old in—in everything else, who has not scrupled to indite an amatory note, so appalling in its familiarity, and so outrageous in the warmth of its sentiments, that I cannot bring myself to shock your ears with its contents.

"You do well to shun him as a moral leper; but how shall I tell you that, not satisfied with pressing his effusions upon the shrinking object of his precocious affections, the miserable being has availed himself of the shelter of a church to cloak his insidious advances, and even forces a response to them from a heedless and imprudent girl!

"If," continued the doctor, now allowing his powerful voice to boom to its full compass—"if I can succeed in bringing this coward, this unmanly dallier in a sentiment which the healthy mind of boyhood rejects as premature, to a sense of his detestable conduct; if I can score the lesson upon his flesh so that some faint notion of its force and purport may be conveyed to what has been supplied to him as a heart, then I shall not have lifted this hand in vain!

"He shall see whether he will be allowed to trail the fair name of the school, for propriety and correctness of deportment, in the dust of a pew-floor, and spurn my reputation as a preceptor like a church hassock beneath his feet!

"I shall say no more; I will not prolong these strictures, deserved though they be, beyond their proper limits. . . . I shall now proceed to act. Richard Bultitude, remain there till I return to mete out to you with no sparing hand the punishment you have so richly merited."

With these awful words the doctor left the room, leaving Paul in a state of abject horror and dread which need not be described. Never, never again would he joke, as he had been wont to do with Dick in lighter moods, on the subject of corporal punishment under any circumstances, it was no fit theme for levity; if this—this outrage were really done to him, he could never be

able to hold up his head again. What if it were to get about in the city!

The boys, who had sunk, as they always did, into a state of torpid awe under the doctor's eloquence, now recovered spirits enough to rally Paul with much sprightly humor.

"He's gone to fetch his cane," said some, and imitated for Paul's instruction the action of caning by slapping a ruler upon a copy-book with a dreadful fidelity and resonance; others sought to cross-examine him upon the love-letter; it appearing from their casual remarks that not a few had been also honored by communications from the artless Miss Davenant.

It is astonishing how unfeeling even ordinary good-natured boys can be at times.

Sludge sat at his desk with raised shoulders, rubbing his hands, and grinning like some malevolent ape. "I told you, Dicky, you know," he murmured, "that it was better not to cross me."

And still the doctor lingered. Some kindly suggested that he was "waxing the cane." But the more general opinion was that he had been detained by some visitor; for it appeared that (though Paul had not noticed it) several had heard a ring at the bell. The suspense was growing more and more unbearable.

At last the door opened in a slow, ominous manner, and the doctor appeared. There was a visible change in his manner, however. The white heat of his indignation had died out; his expression was grave but distinctly softened—and he had nothing in his hand.

"I want you outside, Bultitude," he said; and Paul, still uncertain whether the scene of his disgrace was only about to be shifted, or what else this might mean, followed him into the hall.

"If anything can strike shame and confusion into your soul, Richard," said the doctor, when they were outside, "it will be what I have to tell you now. Your unhappy father is here, in the dining-room."

Paul staggered. Had Dick the brazen effrontery to come here to taunt him in his slavery? What was the meaning of it? What should he say to him? He could not answer the doctor but by a vacant stare.

"I have not seen him yet," said the doctor. "He has come at a most inopportune moment" (here Mr. Bultitude could *not* agree with him). "I shall allow you to meet him first, and give you the opportunity of breaking your conduct to him. I know how it will wring his paternal heart!" and the doctor shook his head sadly, and turned away.

With a curious mixture of shame, anger, and impatience,

Paul turned the handle of the dining-room door. He was to meet Dick face to face once more. The final duel must be fought out between them here. Who would be the victor?

It was a strange sensation on entering to see the image of what he had so lately been standing by the mantel-piece. It gave a shock to his sense of his own identity. It seemed so impossible that that stout, substantial frame could really contain Dick. For an instant he was totally at a loss for words, and stood pale and speechless in the presence of his unprincipled son.

Dick on his side seemed at least as much embarrassed. He giggled uneasily, and made a sheepish offer to shake hands, which was indignantly declined.

As Paul looked he saw distinctly that his son's fraudulent imitation of his father's personal appearance had become deteriorated in many respects since that unhappy night when he had last seen it. It was then a copy, faultlessly accurate in every detail. It was now almost a caricature, a libel!

The complexion was nearly sallow, with the exception of the nose, which had rather deepened in color. The skin was loose and flabby, and the eyes dull and a little bloodshot. But, perhaps the greatest alteration was in the dress. Dick wore an old light tweed shooting coat of his, and a pair of loose trousers of blue serge; while, instead of the formally tied black neckcloth his father had worn for a quarter of a century, he had a large scarf round his neck of some crude and gaudy color; and the conventional chimney-pot hat had been discarded for a shabby old wide-brimmed felt wideawake.

Altogether, it was by no means the costume which a British merchant, with any self-respect whatever, would select, even for a country visit.

And thus they met, as perhaps never, since this world was first set spinning down the ringing grooves of change, met father and son before!

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ERROR OF JUDGMENT.

"The Survivorship of a worthy Man in his Son is a Pleasure scarce inferior to the Hopes of the Continuance of his own Life."—*Spectator.*

Du bist ein Knabe—sei es immerhin
Und fahre fort, den Frohlichen zu spielen.
—Schiller, *Don Carlos.*

Paul was the first to break a very awkward silence.

"You young scoundrel!" he said with suppressed rage. "What the devil do you mean by laughing like that? It's no laughing matter, let me tell you, sir, for one of us!"

"I can't help laughing," said Dick; "you do look so queer!"

"Queer! I may well look queer. I tell you that I have never, never in my whole life spent such a perfectly infernal week as this last!"

"Ah!" observed Dick, "I thought you wouldn't find it *all* jam! And yet you seemed to be enjoying yourself, too," he said, with a grin, "from that letter you wrote."

"What made you come here? Couldn't you be content with your miserable victory without coming down to crow and jeer at me?"

"It isn't that," said Dick. I—I thought I should like to see the fellows, and find out how you were getting on, you know."

These, however, were not his only and his principal motives. He had come down to get a sight of Dulcie.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Bultitude, with ponderous sarcasm, "you'll be delighted to hear that I'm getting on uncommonly well—oh, uncommonly! Your high-spirited young friends batter me to sleep with slippers on most nights, and, as a general thing, kick me about during the day like a confounded football! And last night, sir, I was going to be expelled; and this morning I'm forgiven and sentenced to be soundly flogged before the whole school! It was just about to take place as you came in; and I've every reason to believe it is merely postponed!"

"I say, though," said Dick, "you must have been going it, rather, you know. I've never been expelled. Has Chawner been sneaking again? What have you been up to?"

"Nothing. I solemnly swear—nothing! They're finding out things you've done, and thrashing *me.*"

"Well," said Dick, soothingly, "you'll work them all off

during the term, I daresay. There aren't many really bad ones. I suppose he's seen my name cut on his writing-table?"

"No; not that I'm aware of," said Paul.

"Oh, he'd let you hear of it if he had!" said Dick. "It's good for a whacking, that is. But, after all, what's a whacking? I never cared for a whacking."

"But I do care, sir. I care very much, and, I tell you, I won't stand it. I can't! Dick," he said, abruptly, as a sudden hope seized him. "You—you haven't come down here to say you're tired of your folly, have you? Do you want to give it up?"

"Rather not," said Dick. "Why should I? No school, no lessons, nothing to do but amuse myself, eat and drink what I like, and lots of money. It's not likely, you know."

"Have you ever thought that you're bringing yourself within reach of the law, sir?" said Paul, trying to frighten him. "Perhaps you don't know that there's an offense known as 'false personation with intent to defraud,' and that it's a felony. That's what you're doing at this moment, sir!"

"Not any more than you are!" retorted Dick. "I never began it. I had as much right to wish to be you as you had to wish to be me. You're just what you said you wanted to be, so you can't complain."

"It's useless to argue with you, I see," said Paul. "And you've no feelings. But I'll warn you of one thing. Whether that is my body or not you've fraudulently taken possession of, I don't know; if it is not, it is very like mine, and I tell you this about it. The sort of life you are leading it, sir, will very soon make an end of you, if you don't take care. Do you think that a constitution at my age can stand sweet wines and pastry, and late hours? Why, you'll be laid up with gout in another day or two. Don't tell me, sir. I know you're suffering from indigestion at this very minute. I can see your liver (it may be *my* liver for anything I know) is out of order. I can see it in your eyes."

Dick was a little alarmed at this, but he soon said: "Well, and if I am seedy, I can get Barbara to take the stone and wish me all right again. Can't I? That's easy enough, I suppose?"

"Oh, easy enough!" said Paul, with a suppressed groan. "But, Dick, you don't go up to Mincing Lane in that suit and that hat? Don't tell me you do that!"

"When I do go up, I wear them," said Dick, composedly. "Why not? It's a roomy suit, and I hate a great topper on my head; I've had enough of that here on Sundays. But it's slow up at your office. The chaps there aren't half up to any larks. I made a first-rate booby-trap, though, one day for an old yellow buffer who came in to see you. He *was* in a bait when he found the waste-paper basket on his head!"

"What was his name?" said Paul, with forced calm.

"Something like 'Shells.' He said he was a very old friend of mine, and I told him he lied."

"Shellack—my Canton correspondent—a man I was anxious to be of use to when he came over!" moaned Mr. Bultitude. "Miserable young cub, you don't know what mischief you've done!"

"Well, it won't matter much to you now," said Dick; "you're out of it all."

"Do you—do you mean to keep me out of it forever, then?" asked Paul.

"As long as ever I can!" returned Dick, frankly. "It will be rather interesting to see what sort of a fellow you'll grow into—if you ever do grow. Perhaps you will always be like that, you know. This magic is a rum thing to meddle with."

This suggestion almost maddened Paul. He made one stride forward, and faced his son with blazing eyes. "Do you think I will put up with it?" he said, between his teeth. "Do you suppose I shall stand calmly by and see you degrading and ruining me? I may never be my old self again, but I don't mean to play into your hands for all that. You can't always keep me here, and wherever I go I'll tell my tale. I know you, you clumsy rogue, you haven't the sense to play your part with common intelligence now. You would betray yourself directly I challenged to deny my story. . . . You know you would. . . . You couldn't face me for five minutes. By Gad! I'll do it now. I'll expose you before the doctor—before the whole school. You shall see if you can dispose of me quite so easily as you imagine!"

Dick had started back, at first, in unmistakable alarm at this unexpected defiance, probably feeling his self-possession unequal to such a test; but, when Paul had finished, he said, doggedly: "Well, you can do it if you choose, I suppose. I can't stop you. But I don't see what good it would do."

"It would show people you were an impudent impostor, sir," said Paul, sternly, going to the door as if to call the doctor, though he shrank secretly from so extreme and dangerous a measure.

There was a hesitation in his manner, in spite of the firmness of his words, which Dick was not likely to miss. "Stop!" he said. "Before you call them in, just listen to me for a minute. Do you see this?" And opening his coat, he pulled out from his waistcoat-pocket one end of his watch-chain. Hanging to it, attached by a cheap, gilt fastening of some sort, was a small gray tablet. Paul knew it at once—it was the Garudâ Stone. "You know it, I see," said Dick, as Paul was about to move toward him—with what object he scarcely knew himself. "Don't

trouble to come any closer. Well, I give you fair warning. You can make things very nasty for me if you like. I can't help that; but, if you do, if you try to score off me in any way, now or at any time, if you don't keep it up when the doctor comes in, I tell you what I shall do. I shall go straight home and find young Roly. I shall give him this stone, and just tell him to say some wish after me. I don't believe there are many things it can't do, and all I can say is, if you find yourself and all this jolly old school (except Dulcie) taken off somewhere and stuck down, all at once, thousands of miles away, on a desolate island, or see yourself turned into a red Indian, or—or a cab-horse, you'll have yourself to thank for it, that's all. Now you can have them all up and fire away."

"No," said Paul, in a broken voice, for, wild as the threat was, he could not afford to despise it after his experiences of the stone's power, "I—I was joking, Dick; at least, I didn't mean it. I know, of course, I'm helpless. It's a sad thing for a father to say, but you've got the best of it. I give in. I won't interfere with you. There's only one thing I ask. You won't try any more experiments with that miserable stone. You'll promise me that, at least?"

"Yes," said Dick; "it's all right. I'll play fair. As long as you behave yourself and back me up I won't touch it. I only want to stay as I am. I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't lose it?" said Paul, anxiously. "Couldn't you lock it up? that fastening doesn't look very safe."

"It will do well enough," said Dick. "I got it done at the watchmaker's round the corner, for sixpence. But I'll have a stronger ring put in somewhere if I think of it."

There was a pause, in which the conversation seemed about to flag hopelessly, but at last Dick said, almost as if he felt some compunction for his present unfilial attitude: "Now, you know, it's much better to take things quietly. It can't be altered now, can it? And it's not such bad fun being a boy after all—for some things. You'll get into it by and by, you see if you don't, and be as jolly as a sandboy. We shall get along all right together, too. I sha'n't be hard on you. It isn't my fault that you happen to be at this particular school. You chose it! And after this term you can go to any other school you like—Eton or Rugby, or anywhere. I don't mind the expense. Or, if you'd rather, you can have a private tutor. And I'll buy you a pony, and you can ride in the Row. You shall have a much better time of it than I ever had, as long as you let me go on my own way."

But these dazzling bribes had no influence upon Mr. Bultitude; nothing short of complete restitution would ever satisfy

him, and he was too proud and too angry at his crushing defeat to even pretend to be in the least pacified.

"I don't want your pony," he said, bitterly; "I might as well have a white elephant, and I don't suppose I should enjoy myself much more at a public school than I do here. Let's have no humbug, sir. You're up and I'm down—there's no more to be said—I shall tell the doctor nothing, but I warn you, if ever the time comes——"

"Oh, of course," said Dick, feeling tolerably secure, now he had disposed of the main difficulty. "If you can turn me out, I suppose you will—that's only fair. I shall take care not to give you the chance. And, oh, I say, do you want any tin? How much have you got left?"

Paul turned away his head, lest Dick should see the sudden exultation he knew must appear, as he said, with an effort to appear unconcerned: "I came away with exactly five shillings, and I haven't a penny left."

"I say," said Dick, "you are a fellow; you must have been going it. How did you get rid of it all in a week?"

"It went, as far as I can understand," said Mr. Bultitude, "in rabbits and mice. Some boys claimed it as money they paid you to get them, I believe."

"All your own fault," said Dick; "you would have them drowned. But you'd better have some tin to get along with. How much do you want? Will half a crown do?"

"Half a crown is not much, Dick," said his father, almost humbly.

"It's—ahem—a handsome allowance for a young fellow like you," said Dick, rather unkindly; "but I haven't any half-crowns left. I must give you this, I suppose."

And he held out a sovereign, never dreaming what it signified to Paul, who clutched it with feelings too great for words, though gratitude was not a part of them, for was it not his own money?

"And now look out," said Dick; "I hear Grim. Remember what I told you; keep it up."

Dr. Grimstone came in with the air of a man who has a painful duty to perform; he started slightly as his eye noted the change in his visitor's dress and appearance. "I hope," he began gravely, "that your son has spared me the pain of going into the details of his misbehavior; I wish I could give you a better report of him."

Dick was plainly, in spite of his altered circumstances, by no means at ease in the schoolmaster's presence; he stood, shifting from foot to foot on the hearth-rug, turning extremely red and obstinately declining to raise his eyes from the ground.

"Oh, ah," he stammered at last, "you were just going to whack him, weren't you, when I turned up, sir?"

"I found myself forced," said the doctor, slightly shocked at this coarse way of putting things—"forced to contemplate administering to him (for his ultimate benefit) a sharp corrective in the presence of his schoolfellows. I distress you, I see, but the truth must be told. He has no doubt confessed his fault to you?"

"No," said Dick, "he hasn't, though. What's he been up to now?"

"I had hoped he would have been more open, more straightforward, when confronted with the father who has proved himself so often indulgent and anxious for his improvement; it would have been a more favorable symptom, I think. Well, I must tell you myself. I know too well what a shock it will be to your scrupulously sensitive moral code, my dear Mr. Bultitude" (Dick showed a painful inclination to giggle here); but I have to break to you the melancholy truth that I detected this unhappy boy in the act of conducting a secret and amorous correspondence with a young lady in a sacred edifice!"

Dick whistled sharply. "Oh, I say!" he cried, "that's bad!" (and he wagged his head reprovingly at his disgusted father, who longed to denounce his hypocrisy, but dared not); "that's bad . . . he shouldn't do that sort of thing, you know, should he? At his age, too . . . the young dog!"

"This horror is what I should have expected from you," said the doctor (though he was in truth more than scandalized by the composure with which his annoucement was received). "Such boldness is indeed characteristic of the dog, an animal which, as you are aware, was with the ancients a synonym for shamelessness. No boy, however abandoned, should hear such words of unequivocal condemnation from a father's lips without a pang of shame!"

Paul was only just able to control his rage by a great effort.

"You're right there, sir," said Dick; "he ought to be well ragged for it . . . he'll break my heart, if he goes on like this, the young beggar. But we musn't be too hard on him, eh? After all, it's nature, you know, isn't it?"

"I beg your pardon?" said Dr. Grimstone, very stiffly.

"I mean," explained Dick, with a perilous approach to digging the other in the ribs, "we did much the same sort of thing in our time, eh? I'm sure I did—lots of times!"

"I can't reproach myself on that head, Mr. Bultitude; and permit me to say that such a tone of treating the affair is apt to destroy the effect, the excellent moral effect, of your most impressively conveyed indignation just now. I merely give you a hint, you understand!"

"Oh, ah," said Dick, feeling that he had made a mistake; "yes, I didn't mean that. But, I say, you haven't given him a —a whopping yet, have you?"

"I had just stepped out to procure a cane for that purpose," said the doctor, when your name was announced."

"Well, look here, you won't want to start again when I'm gone, will you?"

"An ancient philosopher, my dear sir, was accustomed to postpone the correction of his slaves until the first glow of his indignation had passed away. He found then that he could——"

"Lay it on with more science," suggested Dick, while Paul writhed where he stood. "Perhaps so, but you might forgive him now, don't you think? he won't do it again. If he goes writing any more love-letters, tell me, and I'll come and talk to him; but he's had a lesson, you know. Let him off this time."

"I have no right to resist such an entreaty," said the doctor, "though I may be inclined myself to think that a few strokes would render the lesson more permanent. I must ask you to reconsider your plea for his pardon."

Paul heard this with indescribable anxiety; he had begun to feel tolerably sure that his evil hour was postponed *sine die*, but might not Dick be cruel and selfish enough to remain neutral, or even side with the enemy, in support of his assumed character?

Luckily he was not. "I'd rather let him off," he said, awkwardly; "I don't approve of caning fellows myself. It never did me any good, I know, and I got enough of it to tell."

"Well, well, I yield. Richard, your father has interceded for you; and I cannot disregard his wishes, though I have my own view in the matter. You will hear no more of this disgraceful conduct, sir, unless you do something to recall it to my memory. Thank your father for his kindness, which you so little deserved, and take your leave of him."

"Oh, there, it's all right!" said Dick; "he'll behave himself after this, I know. And, oh! I say, sir," he added, hastily, "is—is Dulcie anywhere about?"

"My daughter?" asked the doctor. "Would you like to see her?"

"I shouldn't mind," said Dick, blushing furiously.

"I'm sorry to say she has gone out for a walk with her mother," said the doctor. "I'm afraid she cannot be back for some time. It's unfortunate."

Dick's face fell. "It doesn't matter," he muttered, awkwardly. "She's all right, I hope?"

"She is very seldom ailing, I'm happy to say; just now she's particularly well, thank you."

"Oh, is she?" said Dick, gloomily, probably disappointed to find that he was so little missed, and not suspecting that his father had been accepted as a substitute.

"Well, do you mind—could I see the fellows again for a minute or two—I mean I should rather like to inspect the school, you know."

"See my boys? Certainly, my dear sir, by all means; this way," and he took Dick out to the schoolroom, Paul following out of curiosity. "You'll find us at our studies, you see," said the doctor, as he opened the first baize door. There was a suspicious hubbub and hum of voices from within; but as they entered every boy was bent over his books with the wrapt absorption of the devoted student—an absorption that was the direct effect of the sound the door-handle made in turning.

"Our workshop," said the doctor, airily, looking round. "My first form, Mr. Bultitude. Some good workers here, and some idle ones."

Dick stood in the doorway, looking (if the truth must be told) uncommonly foolish. He had wanted, in coming there, to enjoy the contrast between the past and the present—which accounts for a good many visits of "old boys" to the scene of their education. But, confronted with his former schoolfellows, he was seized at first with an utterly unreasonable fear of detection.

The class behaved as classes usually do on such occasions. The good boys smirked and the bad ones stared, the general expression being one of an uneasy curiosity. Dick said never a word, feeling strangely bashful and nervous.

"This is Tipping, my head boy," touching that young gentleman on the shoulder, and making him several degrees more uncomfortable. "I expect solid results from Tipping some day."

"He looks as if his head was pretty solid," said Dick, who had once cut his knuckles against it.

"My second boy, Biddlecomb. If he applies himself, he too will do me credit in the world."

"How do, Biddlecomb?" said Dick. "I owe you ninepence—I mean—oh! hang it, here's a shilling for you! Hallo, Chawner!" he went on, gradually overcoming his first nervousness, "how are you getting on, eh? Doing much in the sneaking way lately?"

"You know him?" exclaimed the doctor, with naïve surprise.

"No, no; I don't know him. I've heard of him, you know—heard of him!" Chawner looked down his nose with a feeble attempt at a gratified simper, while his neighbors giggled with furtive relish.

"Well," said Dick, at last, after a long look at all the old familiar objects, "I must be off, you know. Got some important business at home to look after. The fellows look very jolly and content, and all that sort of thing. Enough to make one want to be a boy again almost, eh? Good-by, you chaps—ahem, young gentlemen, I wish you good-morning!"

And he went out, leaving behind him the impression that "young Bultitude's governor wasn't half such a bad old buffer!"

He paused at the open front door, to which Paul and the doctor had accompanied him. "Good-by," he said; "I wish I'd seen Dulcie, I should like to see your daughter, sir; but it can't be helped. Good-by; and you," he added in a lower tone to his father, who was standing by, inexpressibly pained and disgusted by his utter want of dignity, "you mind what I told you. Don't try any games with me!"

And, as he skipped jauntily down the steps to the gateway, the doctor followed his unwieldy, oddly-dressed form with his eyes, and, inclining his head gravely to Dick's sweeping wave of the hand, asked, with a compassionate tone in his voice, "You don't happen to know, Richard. my boy, if your father has had any business troubles lately—anything to disturb him?"

And Mr. Bultitude's feelings prevented him from making any intelligent reply.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RUBICON.

"My three schoolfellows,
Whom I will trust—as I will adders fanged;
They bear the mandate."

Paul never quite knew how the remainder of that day passed at Crichton House. He was ordered to join a class which was more or less engaged with some kind of work; he had a hazy idea that it was Latin, though it may have been Greek; but he was spared the necessity of taking any active part in the proceedings, as Mr. Blinkhorn was not disposed to be too exacting with a boy who in one short morning had endured a sentence of expulsion, a lecture, the immediate prospect of a flogging, and a paternal visit, and, as before, mercifully left him alone.

His classmates, however, did not show the same chivalrous delicacy; and Paul had to suffer many unmannerly jests and gibes at his expense, frequent and anxious inquiries as to the exact nature of his treatment in the dining room, with sundry highly imaginative versions of the same, while there was much candid and unbiased comment on the apperance and conduct of himself and his son.

But he bore it unprotesting—or, rather, he scarcely noticed it; for all his thoughts were now entirely taken up by one important subject—the time and manner of his escape.

Thanks to Dick's thoughtless liberality, he had now ample funds to carry him safely home. It was hardly likely that any more unexpected claims could be brought against him now, particularly as he had no intention of publishing his return to solvency. He might reasonably consider himself in a position to make his escape at the very first favorable opportunity.

When would that opportunity present itself? It must come soon. He could not wait long for it. Any hour might yet see him pounced upon and flogged heartily for some utterly unknown and unsuspected transgression; or the golden key which would unlock his prison bars might be lost in some unlucky moment; for his long series of reverses had made him loth to trust to fortune, even when she seemed to look smilingly once more upon him.

Fortune's countenance is apt to be so alarmingly mobile with some unfortunates.

But in spite of the new facilities given him for escape, and his strong motives for taking advantage of them, he soon found, to his utter dismay, that he shrank from committing himself to so daring and dangerous a course, just as much as when he had tried to make a confidant of the doctor.

For, after all, could he be sure of himself? Would his ill-luck suffer him to seize the one propitious moment, or would that fatal self-distrust and doubt that had paralyzed him for the past week seize him again just at the crisis?

Suppose he did venture to take the first irrevocable step, could he rely on himself to go through the rest of his hazardous enterprise? Was he cool and wary enough? He dared not expect an uninterrupted run. Had he ruses and expedients at command on any sudden check?

If he could not answer all these doubts favorably, was it not sheer madness to take to flight at all?

He felt a dismal conviction that his success would have to depend, not on his own cunning, but on the forbearance or blindness of others. The slightest *contretemps* must infallibly upset him altogether.

The fact was, he had all his life been engaged in the less

eventful and contentious branches of commerce. His will had seldom had to come in contact with others, and when it did so he had found means, being of a prudent and cautious temperament, of avoiding disagreeable personal consequences by timely compromises or judicious employment of delegates. He had generally found his fellow-men ready to meet him reasonably as an equal or a superior.

But now he must be prepared to see in every one he met a possible enemy, who would hand him over to the tyrant on the faintest suspicion. They were spies to be baffled or disarmed, pursuers to be eluded. The smallest slip in his account of himself would be enough to undo him.

No wonder that, as he thought over all this, his heart quailed within him.

They say—the paradox-mongers say—that it requires a far higher degree of moral courage for a soldier in action to leave the ranks under fire and seek a less distinguished position toward the rear, than would carry him on with the rest to charge a battery.

This may be true, though it might not prove a very valuable defense at a court-martial; but, at all events, Mr. Bultitude found, when it came to the point, that it was almost impossible for him to screw up his courage to run away.

It was not a pleasant state, this indecision whether to stay passively and risk the worst or avoid it by flight; and the worst of it is that, whatever course is eventually forced upon us, it finds us equally unprepared, and more liable from such indecision to bungle miserably in the sequel.

Paul might never have gained heart to venture, but for an unpleasant incident that took place during dinner, and a discovery he made after it.

They happened to have a particularly unpopular pudding that day; a pallid preparation of suet, with an infrequent currant or two embalmed in it, and Paul was staring at his portion of this delicacy disconsolately enough, wondering how he should contrive to consume and, worse still, digest it, when his attention was caught by Jolland, who sat directly opposite him.

That young gentleman, who evidently shared the general dislike to the currant pudding, was inviting Mr. Bultitude's attention to a little contrivance of his own for getting rid of it, which consisted in delicately shoveling the greater part of what was on his plate into a large envelope held below the table to receive it.

This struck Paul as a heaven-sent method of avoiding the difficulty, and he had just got the envelope which had held Barbara's letter out of his pocket, intending to follow Jolland's

example, when the doctor's voice made him start guiltily and replace the envelope in his pocket.

"Jolland," said the doctor, "what have you got there?"

"An envelope, sir," explained Jolland, who had now got the remains of his pudding safely bestowed.

"What is in that envelope?" said the doctor, who happened to have been watching him.

"In the envelope, sir? Pudding, sir," said Jolland, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to send bulky portions of pudding by post.

"And why did you place pudding in the envelope?" inquired the doctor, in his deepest tone.

Jolland felt a difficulty in explaining that he had done so because he wished to avoid eating it, and with a view to interring it later on in the playground; he preferred silence.

"Shall I tell you why you did it, sir?" thundered the doctor. "You did it because you were scheming to obtain a second portion—because you did not feel yourself able to eat both portions at your leisure here, and thought to put by a part to devour in secret at a future time. It's a most painful exhibition of pure piggishness. There shall be no pocketing at this table, sir. You will eat that pudding under my eye at once, and you will stay in and write out French verbs for two days. That will put an end to any more guzzling in the garden for a time, at least."

Jolland seemed stupefied, though relieved, by the unexpected construction put upon his conduct, as he gulped down the intercepted fragments of pudding, while the rest diligently cleared their plates with as much show of appreciation as they could muster.

Mr. Bultitude shuddered at this one more narrow escape. If he had been detected—as he must have been in another instant—in smuggling pudding in an envelope, he might have incautiously betrayed his real motives, and then, as the doctor was morbidly sensitive as to all complaints of the fare he provided, he would have got into worse trouble than the unfortunate Jolland, to say nothing of the humiliation of being detected in such an act.

It was a solemn warning to him of the dangers he was exposed to hourly, while he lingered within those walls; but his position was still more strongly brought home to him by the terrible discovery he made shortly afterward.

He was alone in the schoolroom, for the others had all gone down into the playground, except Jolland, who was confined in one of the classrooms below, when the thought came over him to test the truth of Dick's hint about a name cut on the doctor's writing-table.

He stole up to it guiltily, and, lifting the slanting desk which

stood there, examined the surface below. Dick had been perfectly correct. There it was, glaringly fresh and distinct, not large, but very deeply cut and fearfully legible, "R. Bultitude." It might have been done that day. Dick had probably performed it out of bravado, or under the impression that he was not going to return after the holidays.

Paul dropped the desk over the fatal letters with a shudder. The slightest accidental shifting of it must disclose them—nothing but a miracle could have kept them concealed so long. When they did come to light, he knew, from what he had seen of the doctor, that the act would be considered as an outrage of the blackest and most desperate kind. He would most unquestionably get a flogging for it!

He fetched a large pewter ink-pot, and tried nervously to blacken the letters with the tip of a quill, to make them, if possible, rather less obtrusive than they were. All in vain; they only stood out with more startling vividness when picked out in black upon the brown-stained deal. He felt very like a conscience-stricken murderer trying to hide a corpse that *wouldn't* be buried. He gave it up at last, having only made a terrible mess with the ink.

That settled it. He must fly. The flogging must be avoided at all hazards. If an opportunity delayed its coming, why, he must do without the opportunity—he must make one. For good or ill, his mind was made up now for immediate flight.

All that afternoon, while he sat trying to keep his mind upon long sums in Bills of Parcels, which disgusted him as a business man, by the glaring improbability of their details, his eye wandered furtively down the long tables to where the doctor sat at the head of the class. Every chance movement of the principal's elbow filled him with a sickening dread. A hundred times those rudely carved letters seem about to start forth and denounce him.

It was a disquieting afternoon for Paul.

But the time dragged wearily on, and still the desk loyally kept its secret. The dusk drew on and the gas-burners were lit. The younger boys came up from the lower classroom and were sent out to play; the doctor shortly afterward dismissed his own class to follow them, and Paul and his companions had the room to themselves.

He sat there on the rough form with his slate before him, hearing, half-unconsciously, the shouts, laughter, and ring of feet coming up from the darkness outside, and the faint notes of a piano, which filtered through the double doors from one of the rooms, where a boy was practicing Haydn's "Surprise," from Hamilton's exercise book—a surprise which he rendered as a mildly interjectional form of astonishment.

All the time Paul was racked with an intense burning desire to get up and run for it then, before it became too late; but cold fits of doubt and fear preserved him from such lunacy; he would wait, his chance might come before long.

His patience was rewarded; the doctor came in, looking at his watch, and said:

"I think these boys have had enough of it, Mr. Tinkler, eh? You can send them out now till tea-time."

Mr. Tinkler, who had been entangling himself frightfully in intricate calculations upon the blackboard, without making a single convert, was only too glad to take advantage of the suggestion, and Paul followed the rest into the playground with a sense of relief.

The usual "chevy" was going on there, with more spirit than usual, perhaps, because the darkness allowed of practical jokes and surprises, and offered great facilities for paying off old grudges with secrecy and dispatch, and, as the doctor had come to the door of the greenhouse, and was looking on, the players exerted themselves still more, till the prison, to which most of which had been consigned by being run down and touched by their fleeter enemies, was filled with a long line of captives holding hands and calling out to be released.

Paul, who had run out vaguely from his base, was promptly pursued and made prisoner by an unnecessarily vigorous thump in the back, after which he took his place at the bottom of the line of imprisoned ones.

But the enemy's spirit began to slacken; one after another of the players still left to the opposite side succeeded in outrunning pursuit and touching the foremost prisoner for the time being so as to set him free by the rules of the game. The doctor went in again, and the enemy relapsed as usual into total indifference, so that Paul, without exactly knowing how, soon found himself the only one left in jail, unnoticed and apparently forgotten.

He could not see anything through the darkness, but he heard the voices of the boys disputing at the other side of the playground; he looked round; at his right was the indistinct form of a large laurel bush, behind that he knew was the playground gate. Could it be that his chance had come at last?

He slipped behind the laurel and waited, holding his breath; the dispute still went on; no one seemed to have noticed him, probably the darkness prevented all chance of that; he went on tip-toe to the gate—it was not locked.

He opened it very carefully a little way; it was forbearing enough not to creak, and the next moment he was outside, free to go where he would!

Escape, after all, was simple enough when he came to try it;

he could hardly believe at first that he really was free at last; free with money enough in his pocket to take him home, with the friendly darkness to cover his retreat; free to go back and confront Dick on his own ground, and, by force or fraud, get the Garudâ stone into his own hands once more.

As yet he never doubted that it would be easy enough to convince his household, if necessary, of the truth of his story, and enlist them one and all on his side; all that he required, he thought, was caution; he must reach the house unobserved, and wait and watch, and the deuce would be in it if the stone were not safe in his pocket again before twelve hours had gone by.

All this time he was still within a hundred yards or so of the playground wall; he must decide upon some particular route, some definite method of ordering his flight; to stay where he was any longer would clearly be unwise, yet, where should he go first?

If he went to the station at once, how could he tell that he should be lucky enough to catch a train without having to wait long for it, and unless he did that, he would almost certainly be sought for first on the station platform, and might be caught before a train was due.

At last, with an astuteness he had not suspected himself of possessing, which was probably the result of the harrowing experiences he had lately undergone, he hit upon a plan of action. "I'll go to a shop," he thought, "and change this sovereign, and ask to look at a time-table—then, if I find I can catch a train at once, I'll run for it; if one is not due for some time, I can hang about near the station till it comes in."

With this intention he walked on toward the town till he came to a small terrace of shops, when he went into the first, which was a stationer's and toy dealer's, with a stock in trade of cheap wooden toys and incomprehensible games, drawing slates, penny packets of stationery, and cards of pen and pencil holders, and a particularly stuffy atmosphere; the proprietor, a short man with a fat face with a rich glaze all over it, and a fringe of ragged brown whisker meeting under his chin, was sitting behind the counter posting up his ledger.

Paul looked round the shop in search of something to purchase, and at last said, more nervously than he expected to do: "I want a pencil-case—one which screws up and down." He thought a pencil-case would be an innocent, unsuspicious thing to ask for. The man set rows of cards containing pencil-cases of every imaginable shape on the counter before him, and, when Mr. Bultitude had chosen one, the stationer asked if there would be anything else, and if he might send it for him. "You're one of Dr. Grimstone's young gentlemen up at Crichton House, aren't you, sir?" he added.

A guilty dread of discovery made Paul anxious to deny this at once. "No," he said; "oh, no; no connection with the place. Ah, could you allow me to look at a time-table?"

"Certainly, sir; expectin' some one to-night, or to-morrow p'raps. Let me see," he said, consulting a table which hung behind him. "There's a train from Pancras comes in half an hour from now, 6.05 that is; there's another due at 8.15, and one at 9.30. Then from Liverpool Street they run"——

"Thank you," said Mr. Bultitude, "but—but I want the up-trains."

"Ah," said the man, with a rather peculiar intonation, "I thought maybe you par or your mar was comin' down. Ain't Dr. Grimstone got the times the trains go?"

"Yes," said Paul, desperately, without very well knowing what he said, "yes, he has, but, ah, not for this month; he—he sent me to inquire."

"Did he though?" said the stationer. "I thought you wasn't one of his young gentlemen?"

Mr. Bultitude saw what a fearful trap he had fallen into, and stood speechless.

"Go along with you!" said the little stationer at last, with a not unkindly grin. "Lor' bless you, I knew your face the minnit you come in. To go and tell me such a brazen story like that! You're a young pickle, you are!"

Mr. Bultitude began to shuffle feebly toward the door. "Pickle, eh?" he protested, in great discomposure. "No, no. Heaven knows I'm no pickle. It's of no consequence about those trains. Don't trouble. Good evening to you."

"Stop," said the man; "don't be in such a hurry now. You tell me what you want to know straightforward, and I don't mean to say as I won't help you so far as I can. Don't be afraid of my telling no tales. I've bin a schooboy myself in my time, bless your 'art. I shouldn't wonder now if I couldn't make a pretty good guess without telling at what you're after. You've bin a catchin' of it hot, and you want to make a clean bolt of it. I ain't very far off now, am I?"

"No," said Paul; for something in the man's manner inspired confidence. "I do want to make a bolt of it. I've been most abominably treated."

"Well, look here, I ain't got no right to interfere; and, if you're caught, I look to you not to bring my name in. I don't want to get into trouble up at Crichton House and lose good customers, you see. But I like the looks of you, and you've always dealt 'ere pretty regular. I don't mind if I give you a lift. Just see here. You want to get off to London, don't you? What for is your business, not mine. Well, there's a train, express, stops at only one station on the way, in at 5:50. It's twenty

minnits to six now. If you take that road just oppersite, it'll bring you out at the end of the Station Road; you can do it easy in ten minnits and have time to spare. So cut away, and good luck to you!"

"I'm vastly obliged to you," said Paul, and he meant it. It was a new experience to find any one offering him assistance. He left the close little shop, crossed the road, and started off in the direction indicated to him at a brisk trot.

His steps rang out cheerfully on the path iron-bound with frost. He was almost happy again under the exhilarating glow of unusual exercise and the excitement of escape and regained freedom.

He ran on, past a series of villa residences inclosed in varnished palings and adorned with that mediæval abundance of turrets, balconies, and cheap stained glass, which is accepted nowadays as a guarantee of the tenant's culture, and a satisfactory substitute for effective drainage. After the villas came a church, and a few yards farther on the road turned with a sharp curve into the main thoroughfare leading to the station.

He was so near it that he could hear the shrill engine whistles, and the banging of trucks on the railway sidings echoed sharply from the neighboring houses. He was saved, in sight of haven at last!

Full of delight at the thought, he put on a still greater pace, and, turning the corner, ran into a little party of three, which was coming in the opposite direction.

Fate's vein of irony was by no means worked out yet. As he was recovering from the collision, and preparing to offer or accept an apology, as the case might be, he discovered to his horror that he had fallen among no strangers.

The three were his old acquaintances, Coker, Coggs, and the virtuous Chawner—of whom he had fondly hoped he had seen the last for ever!

The moral and physical shock of such an encounter took all Mr. Bultitude's remaining breath away. He stood panting under the sickly rays of a street-lamp, the very incarnation of helpless, hopeless dismay.

"Hallo!" said Coker, "it's young Bultitude!"

"What do you mean by cannoning into a fellow like this?" said Coggs. "What are you up to out here, eh?"

"If it comes to that," said Paul, casting about for some explanation of his appearance, "what are you up to here?"

"Why," said Chawner, "if you want to know, Dick, we've been to fetch the 'St. James' Gazette' for the doctor. He said I might go if I liked, and I asked for Coker and Coggs to come

too, because there was something I wanted to tell them, very important, and I have told them, haven't I, Corny?"

Coggs growled sulkily; Coker gave a tragic groan, and said: "I don't care when you tell, Chawner. Do it to-night, if you like. Let's talk about something else. Bultitude hasn't told us yet how he came out here after us?"

His last words suggested a pretext to Paul, of which he hastened to make use! "Oh," he said, "I? I came out here, after you, to say that Dr. Grimstone will not require the 'St. James' Gazette.' He wants the 'Globe,' and, ah, the 'Echo,' instead."

It did not sound a very probable combination; but Paul used the first names that occurred to him, and, as it happened, aroused no suspicions, for the boys read no newspapers.

"Well, we've got the other now," said Coker. "We shall have to go back and get the fellow at the bookstall to change it, I suppose. Come on, you fellows!"

This was at least a move in the right direction; for the three began at once to retrace their steps. But, unfortunately, all these explanations had taken time, and, before they had gone many yards, Mr. Bultitude was horrified to hear the station bell ring loudly, and immediately after a cloud of white steam rose above the station roof as the London train clanked cumbrously in, and was brought to with a prolonged screeching of brakes.

The others were walking very slowly. At the present pace it would be almost impossible to reach the train in time. He looked round at them anxiously. "H-hadn't we better run, don't you think?" he asked.

"Run!" said Coker, scornfully. "What for? I'm not going to run. You can, if you like."

"Why, ah, really," said Paul, briskly, very grateful for the permission; "do you know, I think I will!"

And run he did, with all his might, rushing headlong through the gates, threading his way between the omnibuses and under the Roman noses of the mild fly-horses in the inclosure, until at length he found himself inside the little booking-office.

He was not too late; the train was still at the platform, the engine getting up steam with a dull roar. But he dared not risk detection by traveling without a ticket. There was time for that, too. No one was at the pigeon-hole but one old lady. But, unhappily, the old lady considered taking a ticket as a solemn rite to be performed with all due caution and deliberation. She had already catechised the clerk upon the number of stoppages during her proposed journey, and exacted earnest assurances from him that she would not be called upon to change anywhere in the course of it; and as Paul came up she

was laying out the purchase-money for her ticket upon the ledge and counting it, which, the fare being high and the coins mostly half-pence, seemed likely to take some time.

"One moment, ma'am, if you please," cried Mr. Bultitude, panting and desperate. "I'm pressed for time."

"Now you've gone and put me out, little boy," said the old lady, fussily. "I shall have to begin all over again. Young man, will you take and count the other end and see if it adds up right? There's a half-penny wrong somewhere; I know there is?"

"Now, then," shouted the guard from the platform. "Any more going on?"

"I'm going on!" said Paul. "Wait for me. First single to St. Pancras, quick!"

"Drat the boy!" said the old lady, angrily. "Do you think the world's to give way for you! Such impidence! Mind your manners, little boy, can't you? You've made me drop a three-penny-bit with your scrouging!"

"First single, five shillings," said the clerk, jerking out the precious ticket.

"Right!" cried the guard at the same instant. "Stand back there, will you?"

Paul dashed toward the door of the booking-office which led to the platform; but just as he reached it a gate slammed in his face with a sharp click. Through the bars of it he saw, with hot eyes, the tall, heavy carriages which had shelter and safety in them jolt heavily past, till even the red lamp in the last van was quenched in the darkness.

That miserable old woman had shattered his hopes at the very moment of their fulfillment. It was fate again:

As he stood, fiercely gripping the bars of the gate, he heard Coggs' hateful voice again.

"Hallo! so you haven't got the 'Globe' and the other thing after all, then; they've shut you out?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bultitude, in a hollow voice; "they've shut me out!"

CHAPTER XVI.

HARD PRESSED.

"Mark the poor wretch, to overshoot his troubles
How he outruns the wind, and with what care
He cranks and crosses with a thousand doubles;
The many musets through the which he goes
Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes."

As soon as the gate was opened Paul went through mechanically with the others on to the platform, and waited at the bookstall while they changed the paper. He knew well enough that what had seemed at the time a stroke of transcendental cunning would now only land him in fresh difficulties, if, indeed, it did not lead to the detection of his scheme. But he dared not interfere and prevent them from making the unlucky exchange. Something seemed to tie his tongue, and in sullen, leaden apathy he resigned himself to whatever might be in store for him.

They passed out again by the booking-office. There was the old lady still by the pigeon-hole, trying to persuade the much-enduring clerk to restore a lucky sixpence she had given him by mistake, and was quite unable to describe. Mr. Bultitude would have given much just then to go up and shake her into hysterics, or curse her bitterly for the mischief she had done; but he refrained, either from an innate chivalry, or from a feeling that such an outburst would be ill-judged.

So, silent and miserable, with slow step and hanging head, he set out with his jailers to render himself up once more at his house of bondage—a sort of involuntary Regulus, without the oath.

"Dickie, you were very anxious to run just now," observed Chawner, after they had gone some distance on their homeward way.

"We were late for tea—late for tea," explained Paul, hastily.

"If you think the tea worth racing like that for, I don't," said Coggs, viciously; "its muck."

"You don't catch me racing, except for something worth having," said Coker.

One more flash of distinct inspiration came to Paul's aid in the very depths of his gloom. It was, in fact, a hazy recollection from English history of the ruse by which Edward I, when a prince, contrived to escape from his captors at Dover Castle.

"Why—why," he said, excitedly, "would you race if you had something worth racing for, hey? would you, now?"

"Try us!" said Coker, emphatically.

"What do you call 'something' ?" inquired Chawner, suspiciously.

"Well," said Mr. Bultitude, "what do you say to a shilling?"

"You haven't got a shilling," objected Coggs.

"Here's a shilling, see," said Paul, producing one. "Now, then, I'll give this to any boy I see get into tea first!"

Bultitude thinks he can run," said Coker, with an amiable unbelief in any disinterestedness. "He means to get in first, and keep the shilling himself, I know."

"I'll back myself to run him any day," put in Coggs.

"So will I," added Chawner.

"Well, is it agreed?" Paul asked, anxiously, "Will you try?"

"All right," said Chawner. "You must give us a start to the next lamp-post, though. You stay here, and when we're ready, we'll say 'off'!"

They drew a line on the path with their feet to mark Paul's starting point, and went on to the next lamp. After a moment or two of anxious waiting he heard Coggs shout, all in one breath, "One-two-three-off!" and the sound of scampering feet followed immediately.

It was a most exciting and hotly contested race. Paul saw them for one brief moment in the lamplight. He saw Chawner scudding down the path like some great camel, and Coker squaring his arms and working them as if they were wings. Coggs seemed to be last.

He ran a little way himself just to encourage them, but, as the sound of their feet grew fainter and fainter, he felt that his last desperate ruse had taken effect, and, with a chuckle at his own cleverness, turned round and ran his fastest in the opposite direction! He felt a little or no interest in the result of the race.

Once more he entered the booking-office, and, kneeling on a chair, consulted the time-board that hung on the wall over the sheaf of texts and the missionary box.

The next train was not until 7:25. A whole hour and twenty-five minutes to wait! What was he to do? Where was he to pass the weary time till then? If he lingered on the platform he would assuredly be recaptured. His absence could not remain long undiscovered; and the station would be the first place they would search for him.

And yet he dared not wander away from the neighborhood of the station. If he kept to the shops and lighted thoroughfares he might be recognized or traced. If, on the other hand, he went out farther into the country (which was utterly unknown to him) he had no watch, and it would be only too easy

to lose his way, or miscalculate time and distance in the darkness.

To miss the next train would be absolutely fatal.

He walked out upon the platform, and on past the refreshment and waiting-rooms, past the weighing machine, the stacked trucks and the lamp-room, meeting and seen by none; even the boy at the bookstall was busy with bread and butter and a mug of tea in a dark corner, and never noticed him.

He went on to the end of the platform, where the planks sloped gently down to a wilderness of sheds, coaling stages, and sidings; he could just make out the bulky forms of some tarpaulined cattle-vans and open coal-trucks standing on the lines of metals which gleamed in the scanty gaslights.

It struck him that one of these vans or trucks would serve his purpose admirably, if he could only get into it, and very cautiously he picked his way over the clogging ballast and rails, till he came to a low, narrow strip of platform between two sidings.

He mounted it, and went on till he came to the line of trucks and vans drawn up alongside; the vans seemed all locked, but at the end he found an empty coal-wagon in which he thought he could manage to conceal himself and escape pursuit till the longed-for 7:25 train should arrive to relieve him.

He stepped in and laid down in one corner of it, listening anxiously for any sound of search, but, hearing nothing more than the dismal dirge of the telegraph-wires overhead, he soon grew cold and stiff, for his enforced attitude was far from comfortable, and there was more coal-dust in his chosen retreat than he could have wished. Still it was secluded enough; it was not likely that it would occur to any one to look for him there. Ten days ago Mr. Paul Bultitude would have found it hard to conceive himself lying down in a hard and grimy coal-truck to escape his son's schoolmaster, but since then he had gone through too much than was unprecedented and abnormal to see much incongruity in his situation; it was all too hideously real to be a nightmare.

But even here he was not allowed to remain undisturbed; after about half an hour, when he was beginning to feel almost secure, there came a sharp twanging of wires beneath, and two short strokes of a bell in the signal-box hard by.

He heard some one from the platform, probably the station-master, shout: "Look alive, there, Ing, Pickstones, some of you. There's those three trucks on the A siding to go on to Slopsbury by the 6:30 luggage; she'll be in in another five minutes."

There were steps as if some persons were coming out of a

cabin opposite; they came nearer and nearer. "These three, ain't it, Tommy?" said a gruff voice close to Paul's ear.

"That's it, mate," said another, evidently Tommy's; "get 'em along up to the points there. Can't have the 6.30 standing about on this 'ere line all night 'cos of the Limited. Now, then, altogether, shove! they've got the old 'orse on at the other end."

And, to Paul's alarm, he felt the truck in which he was begin to move ponderously on the greasy metals, and strike the next with its buffers with a jarring shock and a jangling of coupling chains.

He could not stand this; unless he revealed himself at once, or managed to get out of this delusive wagon, the six-whatever-it-was train would be up and carry him off to Slopsbury, a hundred miles or so farther from home; they would have time to warn Dick—he would be expected—ambushes lain for him, and his one chance would be gone for ever!

There was a whistle far away on the down line, and that humming vibration which announces an approaching train; not a moment to lose—he was afraid to attempt a leap from the moving wagons, and resolved to risk all and show himself.

With this intention he got upon his knees, and, putting his head above the dirty bulwark, looked over and said: "Tommy, I say, Tommy!"

A porter, who had been laboriously employed below, looked up with a white and scared face, and staggered back several feet. Mr. Bultitude, in a sudden panic, ducked again.

"Bill!" Paul heard the porter say, hoarsely, "I'll take my Bible oath I've never touched a drop this week, not to speak of —but I've got 'em again, Bill, I've got 'em again!"

"Got what agin?" growled Bill. "What's the matter now?"

"It's the jumps, Bill," gasped the other, "the 'orrors—they've got me, and no mistake. As I'm a livin' man, as I was a shovin' of that there truck I saw a imp—a gashly imp, Bill, stick its hugly 'ed over the side and say, 'Tommy,' it ses, jest like that—it ses, 'Tommy, I wants you!' I dursn't go near it, Bill. I'll get leave, and go 'ome and lay up—it glared at me so 'orrid, Bill, and grinned—ugh! I'll take the pledge after this 'ere, I will—I'll go to chapel Sundays reg'lar!"

"Let's see if there ain't something there first," said the practical Bill. "Easy with the oss up there. Now then," here he stepped on the box of the wheel and looked in. "Shin out of this, whatever y'are, we don't contrack to carry no imps on this line—well, if ever I—Tommy, old man, it's all right, y'ain't got 'em this time—'ere's yer imp!"

And, reaching over, he hauled out the wretched Paul by the

scruff of his neck in a state of utter collapse, and deposited him on the ground before him.

"That ain't your private kerridge, yer know, that ain't; there wasn't no bed up there for you, that I know on. You ain't arter no good, now; you'se a wagabone! that's about your size, I can see; what d'yer mean by it, eh?"

"Shet yer 'ed, Bill, will yer," said Tommy, whose relief probably softened his temper; "this here's a young gent."

"Young gent, or no young gent," replied Bill, sententiously, "he's no call to go 'idin' in our waggins and givin' 'ard-workin' men a turn. Old 'im tight, Tommy—here's the luggage down on us."

Tommy held him fast with a grip of iron, while the other porters coupled the trucks, and the luggage train lumbered away with its load.

After this the men slouched up and stood round their captive, staring at him curiously.

"Look here, my men," said Paul, "I've run away from school; I want to go on to town by the next train, and I took the liberty of hiding in the truck, because the schoolmaster will be up here very soon to look for me—you understand?"

"I understand," said Bill, "and a nice young party you are."

"I—I don't want to be caught," said Paul.

"Naterally," assented Tommy, sympathetically.

"Well, can't you hide me somewhere where he won't see me? Come, you can do that?"

"What do you say, Bill?" asked Tommy.

"What'll the guv'nor say?" said Bill, dubiously.

"I've got a little money," urged Paul. "I'll make it worth your while."

"Why didn't you say that afore?" said Bill; "the guv'nor needn't know."

"Here's half a sovereign between you," said Paul, holding it out.

"That's something like a imp," said Tommy, warmly; "if all the bogeys acted as 'andsome as this 'ere, I don't care how often they shows theirselves. We'll have a supper on this, mates, and drink young Delirium Trimminses' jolly good 'ealth. You come along o' me, young shaver; I'll stow you away right enough, and let you out when your train comes in."

He led Paul on to the platform again and opened a sort of cupboard or closet. "That's where we keeps the brooms and lamp-rags, and them," he said; "it ain't what you may call tidy, but if I lock you in no one won't trouble you."

It was perfectly dark, and the rags smelt unpleasantly, but Mr. Bultitude was very glad of this second ark of refuge, even though he did bruise his legs over the broom-handles; he was

gladder still by and by, when he heard a rapid, heavy footfall outside, and a voice he knew only too well, saying: "I want to see the station-master. Ha, there he is. Good-evening, station-master, you know me—Dr. Grimstone, of Crichton House. I want you to assist me in a very unpleasant affair—the fact is, one of my pupils has had the folly and wickedness to run away."

"You don't say so!" said the station-master.

"It's only too true, I'm sorry to say; he seemed happy and contented enough, too; it's a black, ungrateful business. But I must catch him, you know; he must be about here somewhere, I feel sure. You don't happen to have noticed a boy who looked as if he belonged to me? They can't tell me at the booking-office."

How glad Paul was now he had made no inquiries of the station-master.

"No," said the latter, "I can't say I have, sir, but some of my men may have come across him. I'll inquire—here, Ing, I want you; this gentleman has lost one of his boys; have you seen him?"

"What sort of a young gentleman was he to look at?" Paul heard Tommy's voice ask.

"A bright, intelligent-looking boy," said the doctor; "medium height, about thirteen, with auburn hair."

"No, I ain't seen no intelligent boys with median 'eight," said Tommy, slowly, "not, leastways, to speak to positive. What might he 'ave on, now, besides his 'oburn 'air?"

"Black cloth jacket, with a wide collar," was the answer; "gray trousers, and a cloth cap with a leather peak."

"Oh," said Tommy, "then I see 'im."

"When—where?"

"'Bout arf an 'our since."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"Well," said Tommy, to Paul's intense horror, for he was listening, quaking, to every word of this conversation, which was held just outside his cupboard door. "I dessay I could give a guess if I give my mind to it."

"Out with it, Ing, now, if you know; no tricks," said the station-master, who had apparently just turned to go away. "Excuse me, sir, but I've some things in there to see after."

When he had gone, the doctor said, rather heatedly: "Come, you're keeping something from me; I will have it out of you. If I find you have deceived me, I'll write to the manager and get you sent about your business; you'd better tell me the truth."

"You see," said Tommy, very slowly and reluctantly, "that young gent o' yourn was a gent."

"I tried my very best to render him so," said the doctor, stiffly; here is the result—how did you discover he was one, pray?"

"'Cos he acted like a gent," said Tommy; "he took and give me a 'arf-suffering."

"Well, I'll give you another," said the doctor, "if you can tell me where he is."

"Thankee, sir, don't you be afraid; you're a gent right enough, too, though you do 'appen to be a school-master."

"Where is the unhappy boy?" interrupted the doctor.

"Seems as if I was a roundin' on 'im, like, don't it a'most, sir?" said Tommy, with too evident symptoms of yielding in his voice.

Paul shook so in his terror that he knocked down a broom or two with a clatter, which froze his blood.

"Not at all," said the doctor, "not at all, my good fellow; you're—ahem—advancing the cause of moral order."

"Oh, ah!" said Tommy, obviously open to conviction. "Well, if I'm a doin' all that, I can't go fur wrong, can I? And, arter all, we mayn't like schools or school-masters, not over above, but we can't get on without 'em, I s'pose. But look ye here, sir—if I goes and tells you where you can get hold of this here boy, you won't go and wallop him now, will ye?"

"I can make no bargains," said the doctor; "I shall act on my own discretion."

"That's it," said Tommy, unaccountably relieved; "spoke like a merciful Christian gen'leman. If you don't go actin' on nothin more but your discretion, you can't hurt him much, I take it. Well then, since you've spoke out fair, I don't mind putting you on his track, like."

If the door of the cupboard had not been locked, Paul would undoubtedly have burst out and yielded himself up, to escape the humiliation of being sold like this by a mercenary and treacherous porter. As it was, he had to wait till the inevitable words should be spoken.

"Well, you see," went on Tommy, very slowly, as if struggling with the remnants of a conscience, "it was like this here: He comes up to me and says—your young gen'leman, I mean—says he, 'Porter, I wants to 'ide; I've run away.' And I says to him, says I, 'It's no use your 'anging about 'ere,' I says, 'cause if you do, your guv'nor (meanin' no offense to you, sir) 'll be comin' up and ketchin' of you on the 'op.' 'Right you are, porter,' says he to me; 'what do you advise?' he says. 'Well,' I says, 'I don' know as I'm right in givin' you no advice at all, havin' run away from them as has the care on you,' I says, 'but if I was a young gen'leman as didn't want to be ketched, I should just walk on to Dufferton; it ain't on'y three mile or so, and

you'll 'ave time for to do it before the up-train comes along there.' 'Thankee, porter,' he says, 'I'll do that,' and away he bolts, and, for anything I know, he's 'arf way there by this time."

"A fly!" shouted the doctor, excitedly, when Tommy had come to the end of his veracious account. "I'll catch the young rascal now. Who has a good horse? Davis, I'll take you. Five shillings if you reach Dufferton before the up-train. Take the——"

The rest was lost in the banging of the fly-door and the rumble of wheels; the terrible man had been got safely off on a wrong scent, and Paul fell back among the lumber in his closet faint with the suspense and relief.

Presently he heard Tommy's chuckling whisper through the key-hole:

"Are you all right in there, sir? He's safe enough now orf on a pretty dance. You didn't think I was goin' to tell on ye, did ye now? I ain't quite sech a cur as that comes to, particular when a young gent saves me from the 'orrors, and gives me a 'arf-suffering. I'll see you through, you make yourself easy about that."

Half an hour went slowly by for Mr. Bultitude in his darkness and solitude. The platform gradualy filled, as he could tell by the tread of feet, the voices, and the scent of cigars, and at last, welcome sound, he heard the station bell ringing for the up train.

It ran in the next minute, shaking the cupboard in which Paul crouched, till the brushes rattled. There was the usual blind hurry and confusion outside as it stopped. Paul waited impatiently inside. The time passed, and still no one came to let him out. He began to grow alarmed. Could Tommy have forgotten him? Had he been sent away by some evil chance at the critical moment? Two or three times his excited fancy heard the fatal whistle sound for departure. Would he be left behind after all?

But the next instant the door was noiselessly unlocked.

"Couldn't do it afore," said honest Tommy. "Our guv'nor would have seen me. Now's your time. Here's a empty first-class coach I've kept for ye. In with you now."

He hoisted Paul up the high foot-board to an empty compartment, and shut the door, leaving him to sink down on the luxurious cushions in speechless and measureless content. But Tommy had hardly done so before he reappeared and looked in.

"I say," he suggested, "if I was you, I'd get under the seat before you gets to Dufferton; otherways your guv'nor'll be spottin' you. I'll lock you in!"

"I'll get under now; some one might see me here," said

Paul; and, too anxious for safety to thank his preserver, he crawled under the low, blue-cushioned seat, which left just room enough for him to lie there in a very cramped and uncomfortable position. Still he need not stay there after the train had once started, except for five minutes or so at Dufferton.

Unfortunately, he had not been long under the seat before he heard two loud, imperious voices just outside the carriage-door.

"Porter! guard! hi, somebody! open this door, will you? it's locked."

"This way, sir," he heard Tommy's voice say outside. "Plenty of room higher up."

"I don't want to go higher up. I'll go here. Just open it at once, I tell you."

The door was opened reluctantly, and two middle-aged men came in.

"Always take the middle carriage of a train," said the first. "Safest in any accident, y'know. Never heard of a middle carriage of a train getting smashed up, to speak of."

The other sat heavily down just over Paul, with a comfortable grunt, and the train started, Paul feeling naturally annoyed by this intrusion, as it compelled him to remain in seclusion for the whole of the journey.

"Still," he thought, "it is lucky that I had time to get under here before they came in; it would have seemed odd if I had done it afterward." And he resigned himself to listen to the conversation which followed.

"What was it we were talking about just now?" began the first. "Let me see. Ah! I remember. Yes; it was a very painful thing—very, indeed, I assure you."

There is a certain peculiar and uncomfortable suspicion that attacks most of us at times, which cannot fairly be set down wholly to self-consciousness or an exaggerated idea of our own importance. I mean the suspicion that a partly heard conversation must have ourselves for its subject. As often as not, of course, it proves utterly unfounded, but once in a way, like most presentiments, it finds itself unpleasantly fulfilled.

Mr. Bultitude, though he failed to recognize either of the voices, was somehow persuaded that the conversation had something to do with himself, and listened with eager attention.

"Yes," the speaker continued; "he was never, according to what I hear, a man of an extraordinary capacity, but he was always spoken of as a man of standing in the city, doing a safe business, not a risky one, and so on, you know. So, of course, his manner, when I called, shocked me all the more."

"Ah!" said the other. "Was he violent or insulting then?"

"No, no! I can only describe his conduct as eccentric—what one might call reprehensibly eccentric and extravagant. I didn't

call exactly in the way of business, but about a poor young fellow in my house, who is, I fear, rather far gone in consumption, and, knowing he was a Life Governor, y'know, I thought he might give me a letter for the hospital. Well, when I got up to Mincing Lane——"

Paul started. It was as he had feared then; they were speaking of him!

"When I got there, I sent in my card with a message that, if he was engaged or anything, I would take the liberty of calling at his private house, and so on. But they said he would see me. The clerk who showed me in said: 'You'll find him a good deal changed, if you knew him, sir. We're very uneasy about him here,' which prepared me for something out of the common. Well, I went into a sort of inner room, and there he was, in his shirt-sleeves, busy over some abomination he was cooking at the stove, with the office-boy helping him! I never was so taken aback in my life. I said something about calling another time, but Bultitude——"

Paul groaned. The blow had fallen. Well, it was better to be prepared and know the worst.

"Bultitude says, just like a great awkward schoolboy, y'know, 'What's your name? How d'ye do? Have some hardbake, it's just done?' Fancy finding a man in his position cooking coffee in the middle of the day, and offering it to a perfect stranger!"

"Softening of the brain—must be," said the other.

"I fear so. Well, he asked what I wanted, and I told him, and he actually said he never did any business now, except sign his name where his clerks told him. He'd worked hard all his life, he said, and was tired of it. Business was, I understood him to say, 'all rot!'

"Then he wouldn't promise me votes, or give me a letter or anything, without consulting his head clerk; he seemed to know nothing about it himself, and, when that was over, he asked me a quantity of frivolous questions which appeared to have a sort of catch in them, as far as I could gather, and he was exceedingly angry when I wouldn't humor him."

"What kind of questions?"

"Well, really, I hardly know. I believe he wanted to know whether I had rather be a bigger fool than I looked, or look a bigger fool than I was, and he pressed me quite earnestly to repeat some foolishness after him about 'being a gold key,' when he said 'he was a gold lock.' I was very glad to get away from him, it was so distressing."

"They tell me he has begun to speculate, too, lately," said the other. "You see his name about in some very queer things. It's a very pitiful affair altogether."

Paul writhed under his seat with shame. How could he, even

if he succeeded in ousting Dick and getting back his old self—how could he ever hold up his head again after this?

Why, Dick must be mad. Even a schoolboy would have had more caution when so much depended on it. But none would suspect the real cause of the change. These horrible tales were no doubt being circulated everywhere.

The conversation fell back into a less personal channel again after this; they talked of "risks," of some one who had only been "writing" a year, and was doing seven thousand a week, of losses they had been "on," and of the uselessness of "writing five hundred on everything," and while at this point the train slackened and stopped—they had reached Dufferton.

There was an opening of doors all along the train, and sounds as of some inquiry and answer at each. The voices became audible at length, and, as he had expected, Paul found that the doctor, not having discovered him on the platform, was making a systematic search of the train, evidently believing that he had managed to slip in somewhere unobserved.

It was a horrible moment when the door of his compartment was flung open. and a stream of ice-cold air rushed under the blue cloth, which, fortunately for Paul, hung down almost to the floor.

Some one held a lantern up outside, and by its rays Paul saw from behind the hanging the upper half of Dr. Grimstone appear; very pale and polite, at the doorway. He remained there for some moments without speaking, carefully examining every corner of the compartment.

The two men on the seats drew their wraps about them and shivered, until at length one said, rather testily: "Get in, sir; kindly get in if your coming on, please. This draught is most unpleasant!"

"I do not propose to travel by this train, sir," said the doctor; "but, as a person intrusted with the care of youth, permit me to inquire whether you have seen (or, it may be, assisted to conceal) a small boy of an intelligent appearance——"

"Why should we conceal small boys of intelligent appearance about us, pray?" demanded the man who had described his visit to Mincing Lane, "And may we ask you to shut that door, and make any communications you wish to make through the window, or else come in and sit down?"

"That's not an answer to my question, sir," retorted the doctor. "I notice you carefully decline to say whether you have seen a boy. I consider your manner suspicious, sir, and I shall insist on searching this carriage through and through till I find that boy!"

Mr. Bultitude rolled himself up close against the partition at these awful words.

"Guard, guard!" shouted the first gentleman. "Come here. Here's a violent person who will search this carriage for something he has lost. I won't be inconvenienced in this way without any reason whatever! He says we're hiding a boy in here!"

"Guard!" said the doctor, quite as angrily, "I insist upon looking under these seats before you start the train. I've looked through every other carriage and he must be in here. Gentlemen, let me pass; I'll get him if I have to travel in this compartment to town with you!"

"For peace and quietness' sake, gentlemen," said the guard, "let him look around just to ease his mind. Lend me your stick a minute, sir, please. I'll turn him out if he's anywhere about this compartment!"

And with this he pulled Dr. Grimstone down from the footboard and mounted it himself; after which he began to rummage about under the seats with the doctor's heavy stick.

Every lunge found out some tender part in Mr. Bultitude's person, and caused him exquisite torture; but he clenched his teeth hard to prevent a sound, while he thought each fresh dig must betray his whereabouts.

"There," said the guard, at last, "there really ain't no one there, sir, you see. I've felt everywhere, and— Hello, I certainly did feel something just then, gentlemen!" he added, in an undertone, after a lunge which took all the breath out of Paul's body. All was lost now!

"You touch that again with that confounded stick if you dare!" said one of the passengers. "That's a parcel of mine. I won't have you poking holes through it in that way. Don't tell that lunatic behind you. He'll be wanting it opened to see if his boy's inside. Now, perhaps, you'll let us alone."

"Well, sir," said the guard at last to the doctor, as he withdrew, "he ain't in there. There's nothing under any of the seats. Your boy'll be comin' on by the next train—most likely the 8:40. We're all behind. Right!"

"Good-night, sir," said the first passenger, as he leaned out of the window, to the baffled schoolmaster on the platform. "You've put us to all this inconvenience for nothing, and in the most offensive way, too. I hope you won't find your boy till you're in a better temper, for his sake."

"If I had you out on this platform, sir," shouted the angry doctor, "I'd horsewhip you for that insult. I believe the boy's there, and you know it. I——"

But the train swept off, and, to Paul's joy and thankfulness, soon left the doctor gesticulating and threatening, miles behind it.

"What a violent fellow for a schoolmaster, eh?" said one of

Paul's companions, when they were fairly off again. "I wasn't going to have him turning the cushions inside out here; we shouldn't have settled down again before we got in?"

"No; and if the guard hasn't, as it is, injured that Indian shawl in my parcel. I shall be— Why, bless my soul, that parcel's not under the seat, after all! It's up in the rack. I remember putting it there now.

"The guard must have fancied he felt something; and yet— Look here, Goldicutt; just feel under here with your foot. It certainly does seem as if something soft was—eh?

Mr. Goldicutt accordingly explored Paul's ribs with his boot for some moments, which was very painful.

"Upon my word," he said at last, "it really does seem very like it. It's not hard enough for a bag or a hat-box. It yields distinctly when you kick it. Can you fetch it out with your umbrella, do you think? Shall we tell the guard at the next——? Lord! it's coming out of its own accord. It's a dog. No, my stars—it's the boy, after all!"

For Paul, alarmed at the suggestion about the guard, once more felt inclined to risk the worst and reveal himself. Begrimed with coal, smeared with whitewash, and covered with dust and flue, he crawled slowly out and gazed imploringly up at his fellow-passengers.

After the first shock of surprise they lay back in their seats and laughed till they cried.

"Why, you young rascal!" they said, when they recovered breath, "you don't mean to say you've been under there the whole time?"

"I have, indeed," said Paul. "I—I didn't like to come out before."

"And are you the boy all this fuss was about? Yes? And we kept the schoolmaster off without knowing it! Why this is splendid, capital! You're something like a boy, you little dog, you! This is the best joke I've heard for many a day!"

"I hope," said Paul, "I haven't inconvenienced you. I could not help it, really."

"Inconvenienced us? Gad, your schoolmaster came very near inconveniencing us and you too. But there, he won't trouble any of us now. To think of our swearing by all our gods there was no boy in here, and vowing he shouldn't come in, while you were lying down there under the seat all the time! Why, it's lovely! The boy's got pluck and manners too. Shake hands, young gentleman; you owe us no apologies. I haven't had such a laugh for many a day."

"Then you—you won't give me up?" faltered poor Paul.

"Well," said the one who was called Goldicutt, and who was a jovial old gentleman with a pink face and white whiskers,

"we're not exactly going to take the trouble of getting out at the next station, and bringing you back to Dufferton, just to oblige that hot-tempered master of yours; you know he hasn't been so particularly civil as to deserve that."

"But if he were to telegraph, and get some one to stop me at St. Pancras," said Paul, nervously.

"Ah, he might do that, to be sure—sharp boy this—well, as we've gone so far, I suppose we must go through with the business now and smuggle the young scamp past the detectives, eh, Travers?"

The younger man addressed assented readily enough, for the doctor had been so unfortunate as to prejudice them both from the first by his unjustifiable suspicions, and it is to be feared they had no scruples in helping to outwit him.

Then they noticed the pitiable state Mr. Bultitude was in, and he had to give them a fair account of his escape and subsequent adventures, at which even their sympathy could not restrain delighted shouts of laughter—though Paul himself saw little enough in it all to laugh at; they asked his name, which he thought more prudent, for various reasons, to give as "Jones," and other details, which I am afraid he invented as he went on, and altogether they reached Kentish Town in a state of high satisfaction with themselves and their *protégé*.

At Kentish Town there was one more danger to be encountered, for with the ticket-collector there appeared one of the station inspectors. "Beg pardon, gentlemen," said the latter, peering curiously in, "but does that young gent in the corner happen to belong to either of you?"

The white-whiskered gentlemen seemed a little flustered at this downright inquiry, but the other was more equal to the occasion. "Do you hear that, Joonny, my boy," he said to Paul (whom they had managed during the journey to brush and scrape into something approaching respectability); "they want to know if you belong to me. I suppose you'll allow a son to belong to his father to a certain extent, eh?" he asked the inspector.

The man apologized for what he conceived to be a mistake. "We've orders to look out for a young gent about the size of yours, sir," he explained; "no offense meant, I'm sure," and he went away satisfied.

A very few minutes more and the train rolled in to the terminus, under the same wide arch beneath which Paul had stood, helpless and bewildered, a week ago.

"Now my advice to you, young man," said Mr. Goldicutt, as he put Paul into a cab, and pressed half a sovereign into his unwilling hand, "is to go straight home to papa and tell him all about it. I daresay he won't be very hard on you; here's

my card; refer him to me if you like. Good-night, my boy, good-night, and good luck to you. Gad, the best joke I've had for years!"

And the cab rolled away, leaving them standing chuckling on the platform, and, as Paul found himself plunging once more into the welcome roar and rattle of London streets, he forgot the difficulties and dangers that might yet lie before him in the thought that at last he was beyond the frontier, and, for the first time since he had slipped through the playground-gate, he breathed freely.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PERFIDIOUS ALLY.

"But homeward—home—what home? had he a home?"
His home—he walked;
Then down the long street having slowly stolen,
His heart foreshadowing all calamity,
His eyes upon the stones, he reached his home."

Paul had been careful, while in the hearing of his friends, to give the cabman a fictitious address, but as soon as he reached the Euston Road he stopped the man and ordered him to put him down at the church near the south end of Westbourne Terrace, for he dared not drive up openly to his own door.

At last he found himself standing safely on the pavement, looking down the long line of yellow lamps of his own terrace, only a few hundred yards from home.

But, though his purpose was now within easy reach, his spirits were far from high; his anxiety had returned with tenfold power; he felt no eagerness or exultation; on the contrary, the task he had set himself had never before seemed so hopeless, so insurmountable.

He stood for some time by the railing of the church, which was lighted up for evening service, listening blankly to the solemn drone of the organ within, unable to summon up resolution to move from the spot and present himself to his unsuspecting family.

It was a cold night, with a howling wind, and high in the blue-black sky fleecy-white clouds were coursing swiftly along; he obliged himself to set out at last, and walked down the flags toward his house, shivering, as much from nervousness as cold.

There was a dance somewhere in the terrace that evening—a large one; as far as he could see there were close ranks of carriages with blazing lamps, and he even fancied he could hear the shouts of the link-boys and the whistles of the *commissionaires.*

As he came nearer he had a hideous suspicion, which soon became a certainty, that the entertainment was at his own house; worse still, it was of a kind and on a scale calculated to shock and horrify any prudent householder and father of a family.

The balcony above the portico was positively hung with gaudy Chinese lanterns, and there were even some strange sticks and shapes up in one corner that looked suspiciously like fireworks. Fireworks in Westbourne Terrace! What would the neighbors think or do?

Between the wall which separates the main road from the terrace and the street front there were no less than four piano-organs, playing, it is to be feared, by express invitation; and there was the usual crowd of idlers and loungers standing about by the awning stretched over the portico, listening to the music and loud laughter which came from the brilliantly-lighted upper rooms.

Paul remembered then, too late, that Barbara, in that memorable letter of hers, had mentioned a grand children's party as being in contemplation. Dick had held his tongue about it that morning, and he himself had not thought it was to be so soon.

For an instant he felt almost inclined to turn away and give the whole thing up in sick despair—even to return to Rodwell Regis and brave the doctor's anger; for how could he hope to explain matters to his family and servants, or get the Garudâ Stone safely into his hands again before all these guests, in the whirl and tumult of an evening party?

And yet he dared not, after all, go back to Crichton House—that was too terrible an alternative—and he obviously could not roam the world to any extent, a runaway schoolboy to all appearance, and with less than a sovereign in his pocket!

After a short struggle he felt he must make his way in, watch and wait, and leave the rest to chance. It was his evil fate, after all, that had led him on to make his escape on this night, of all others, and had allowed him to come through so much, only to be met with these unforeseen complications just when he might have imagined the worst was over.

He forced his way through the staring crowd, and went down the steps into the area; for he naturally shrank from braving the front door, with its crowd of footmen and hired waiters.

He found the door in the basement open, which was fortunate, and slipped quietly through the pantry, intending to reach the hall by the kitchen stairs. But here another check met

him. The glass door which led to the stairs happened to be shut, and he heard voices in the kitchen, which convinced him that, if he wished to escape notice, he must wait quietly in the darkness until the door was opened for him, whenever that might be.

The door from the pantry to the kitchen was partly open, however, and Mr. Bultitude could not avoid hearing everything that passed there, although every fresh word added to his uneasiness, until at last he would have given worlds to escape from his involuntary position of eavesdropper.

There were only two persons just then in the kitchen—his cook, who, still in her working-dress, was refreshing herself, after her labors over the supper, with a journal of some sort; and the housemaid, who, in neat gala costume, was engaged in fastening a bow more securely in her mob-cap.

"They haven't give me a answer yet, Eliza," said the cook, looking up from her paper.

"Lor', cook!" said Eliza, "you couldn't hardly expect it, seeing you only wrote on Friday."

"No more I did, Eliza. You see, it on'y began to come into my mind sudden like this last week. I'm sure I no more dreamt—— But they've answered a lady who's bin in much the same situation as me, aperiently. You just 'ark to this a minute."

And she proceeded to read from her paper:

"'*Lady Bird:* You ask us (1) what are the signs by which you may recognize the first dawnings of your lover's affection. On so delicate a matter we are naturally averse from advising you; your own heart must be your best guide. But perhaps we may mention a few of the most usual and infallible symptoms.'

"What sort of a thing is a symptim, Eliza?"

"A symptim, cook," explained Eliza, "is a something wrong with the inside. Her at my last place in Cadogan Square had them uncommon bad. She was what they call æsthetical, pore young thing. Them infallible ones are always the worst."

"It don't seem to make sense though, Eliza," objected cook, doubtfully. "Hear how it goes on:

"'Infallible symptoms. If you have truly inspired him with a genuine and lasting passion' (don't he write beautiful?) 'passion, he will continually haunt those places in which you are most likely to be found' (I couldn't tell you the times master's bin down in my kitchen this last week); 'he will appear awkward and constrained in your presence' (anything more awkward than master *I* never set eyes on. He's knocked down one of the

best porcelain vegetables this very afternoon!); 'he will beg for any little favors, some trifle, it may be, made by your own hand' (master's always a-asking if I've got any of those doughnuts to give away); 'and, if granted, he will treasure them in secret with pride and rapture' (I don't think master kep' any of them doughnuts though, Eliza. I saw him swaller five; but you couldn't treasure a doughnut, not to mention—— I'll make him a pin-cushion, when I've time, and see what he does with it). 'If you detect all these indications of liking in the person you suspect of paying his addresses to you, you may safely reckon upon bringing him to your feet in a very short space of time. (2) Yes, Fuller's earth will make them exquisitely white.'

"There, Eliza!" said cook, with some pride, when she had finished; "if it had been meant for me it couldn't have been clearer. Ain't it written nice? And on'y to think of my bringing master to my feet. It seems almost too much for a cook to expect."

"I wouldn't say so, cook—I wouldn't. Have some proper pride. Don't let him think he's only to ask and have! Why, in the *London Journal* last week there was a duke as married a governess; and I should 'ope as a cook ranked above a governess. Nor yet master ain't a duke; he's only in the city! But are you sure he's not only a trifling with your affections, cook? He's bin very affable and pleasant with all of us lately."

"It ain't for me to speak too positive, Eliza," said cook, almost bashfully, "nor to lay bare the feelings of a bosom, beyond what's right and proper. You're young yet, Eliza, and don't understand these things—leastways, it's to be hoped not (Eliza having apparently tossed her head); but do you remember that afternoon last week as master stayed at home a-playing games with the children? I was a-goin' up stairs to fetch my thimble, and there, on the bedroom landin' was master all alone, with one of Master Dick's toy guns in his 'and, and a old slouch 'at on his head.

"'Have you got a pass, cook?' he says, and my 'art came right up into my mouth, he looked that severe and lofty at me. I thought he was put out about somethink.

"I said I didn't know it was required, but I could get one," I says, "not knowing what he was alludin' to all the same.

"But he says, quite soft and tender like (here Paul shivered with shame): 'No, you needn't do that, cook; there ain't no occasion for it; only,' he says, 'if you haven't got no pass, you'll have to give me a kiss, you know, cook!' I thought I should have sunk through the stairs, I was that overcome. I saw through his rouge with half an eye."

"Why, he said the same to me," said Eliza, "only I had a

pass, as luck had it, which Miss Barbara gave me. I'd ha' boxed his ears if he'd tried it, too, master or no master!"

"You talk light, Eliza," said the cook, sentimentally, "but you wern't there to see. It wasn't only the words, it was the way he said it, and the 'ug he gave me at the time. It was as good as a proposial. And, I tell you, whatever you may say—and mark my words—I 'ave 'opes!"

"Then if I was you, cook," said Eliza, "I'd try if I could get him to speak out plain in writing; then, whatever came of it, there'd be as good as five hundred pounds in your pockets."

"Love letters!" cried the cook, "why, if that's all, Lord love you, Eliza—— Why, William, how you made me jump! I thought you was up seein' to the supper-table."

"The pastry-cook's man is looking after all that, Jane," said Boaler's voice. "I've been up outside the droring-room all this time, lookin' at the games goin' on in there. It's as good as a play to see the way as master is a unbendin' of himself, and such a out and out stiff un as he used to be, too! But it ain't what I like to see in a respectable house. I'm glad I gave warning. It doesn't do for a man in my position to compromise his character by such goings on. I never see anything like it in any families I lived with before. Just come up and see for yourself. You needn't mind about cleaning of yourself—they won't see you."

So the cook allowed herself to be persuaded by Boaler, and the two went up to the hall, and, to Mr. Bultitude's intense relief, forgot to close the glazed door which cut him off from the staircase.

As he followed them up stairs at a cautious interval, and thought over what he had just so unwillingly overheard, he felt as one who had just been subjected to a moral shower-bath.

"That dreadful woman!" he groaned. "Who would have dreamed that she would get such horrible ideas into her head? I shall never be able to look either of those women in the face again; they will both have to go—and she made such excellent soup, too. I do hope that miserable Dick has not been fool enough to write to her—but no, that's too absurd."

But more than ever he began to wish that he had stayed in the playground.

When he reached the hall he stood there for some moments in anxious deliberation over his best course of proceeding. His main idea was to lie in wait somewhere for Dick, and try the result of an appeal to his better feelings to acknowledge his outcast parent and abdicate gracefully.

If that failed, and there was every reason to expect that it would fail, he must threaten to denounce him before the whole party. It would cause a considerable scandal no doubt, and be

a painful thing to his own feelings, but still he must do it, or frighten Dick by threatening to do it; and at all hazards he must contrive during the interview to snatch or purloin the magic stone; without that he was practically helpless.

He looked round him; the study was piled up with small boy's hats and coats, and in one corner was a kind of refined bar, where till lately a trim housemaid had been dispensing coffee and weak lemonade; she might return at any moment; he would not be safe there.

Nor would the dining-room be more secluded, for in it there was an elaborate supper being laid out by the waiters, which, as far as he could see through the crack in the door, consisted of lobsters, trifle, and pink champagne. He felt a grim joy at the sight, more than he would suffer for this night's festivities.

As he stole about, with a dismal sense of the unfitness of his sneaking about his own house in this guilty fashion, he became gradually aware of the scent of a fine cigar, one of his own special Cabañas. He wondered who had the impudence to trespass on his cigar-chest; it could hardly be one of the children.

He traced the scent to a billiard-room which he had built out at the side of the house, which was a corner one, and, going down to the door, opened it sharply and walked in.

Comfortably imbedded in the depths of a long, well-padded lounging chair, with a spirit-case and two or three bottles of soda-water at his elbow, sat a man who was lazily glancing through the "Field," with his feet resting on the mantel-piece, one on each side of the blazing fire. He was a man of about the middle size, with a face rather bronzed and reddened by climate, a nose slightly equiline and higher in color, quick, black eyes, with an uneasy glance in them, bushy black whiskers, more like the antiquated "Dundreary" type than modern fashion permits, and a wide, flexible mouth.

Paul knew him at once, though he had not seen him for some years; it was Paradine, his disreputable brother-in-law—the "Uncle Marmaduke," who, by importing the mysterous Garudâ Stone, had brought all these woes upon him; he noticed at once that his appearance was unusually prosperous, and that the velvet smoking-coat he wore over his evening dress was new and handsome. "No wonder," he thought bitterly; "the fellow has been living on me for a week!" He stood by the cue-rack looking at him for some time, and then he said, with a cold, ironic dignity, that (if he had known it) came oddly from his boyish lips: "I hope you are making yourself quite comfortable?"

Marmaduke put down his cigar and stared. "Uncommonly attentive and polite of you to inquire," he said, at last, with a dubious smile, which showed a row of very white teeth, "who-

ever you are. If it will relieve your mind at all to know, young man, I'm happy to say I am tolerably comfortable, thanks."

"I—I concluded as much," said Paul, nearly choked with rage.

"You've been very nicely brought up," said Uncle Marmaduke; "I can see that at a glance. So you've come in here, like me, eh? because the children bore you, and you want a quiet gossip over the world in general? Sit down, then; take a cigar, if you don't think it will make you very unwell. I shouldn't recommend it myself, you know, before supper—but you're a man of the world and know what's good for you. Come along, enjoy yourself till you find yourself getting queer—then drop it."

Mr. Bultitude had always detested the man; there was an underbred swagger and familiarity in his manner that made him indescribably offensive; just now he seemed doubly detestable, and yet Paul, by a strong effort, succeeded in controlling his temper.

He could not afford to make enemies just then, and, objectionable as the man was, his astuteness made him a valuable ally; he determined, without considering the risk of making such a confidant, to tell him all and ask his advice and help.

"Don't you know me, Paradine?"

"I don't think I have the privilege; you're one of Miss Barbara's numerous young friends, I suppose? and yet, now I look at you, you don't seem to be exactly got up for an evening party; there's something in your voice, too, I ought to know."

"You ought," said Paul, with a gulp. "My name is Paul Bultitude!"

"To be sure!" cried Marmaduke. "By Jove, then, you're my young nephew, don't you know; I'm your long-lost uncle, my boy, I am indeed (I'll excuse you from coming to my arms, however; I never was good at family embraces). But, I say, you little rascal, you've never been asked to these festivities; you ought to be miles away, fast asleep in your bed at school. What in the name of wonder are you doing here?"

"I've—left school," said Paul.

"So I perceive, sulky because they left you out of all this, eh? Thought you'd turn up in the middle of the banquet, like the specter bridegroom—'the worms they crawled in, and the worms they crawled out, eh?' Well, I like your pluck, but, ahem—I'm afraid you'll find they've rather an unpleasant way of laying your kind of apparitions."

"Never mind about that," said Paul, hurriedly; "I have something I must tell you—I've no time to lose—I'm a desperate man!"

"You are," Paradine assented with a loud laugh; "oh, you

are indeed! 'a desperate man.' Capital! a stern chase, eh? the schoolmaster close behind with the birch? It's quite exciting, you know, but, seriously, I'm very much afraid you'll catch it!"

"If," began Mr. Bultitude in great embarrassment, "if I was to tell you that I was not myself at all—but somebody else, a—in fact, an entirely different person from what I seem to you to be—I suppose you would laugh?"

"I beg your pardon," said his brother-in-law, politely, "I don't think I quite catch the idea!"

"When I assure you now, solemnly, as I stand here before you, that I am not the miserable boy whose form I am condemned to—wear, you'll say it is incredible?"

"Not at all—by no means, I quite believe you. Only (really it's a mere detail), but I should rather like to know, if you're not that particular boy, what other boy you may happen to be? You'll forgive my curiosity."

"I'm not a boy at all—I'm your own unhappy brother-in-law, Paul! You don't believe me, I see?"

"Oh, pardon me, it's perfectly clear! you're not your own son, but your own father—it's a little confusing at first, but no doubt common enough. I'm glad you mentioned it, though."

"Go on," said Paul, bitterly, "make light of it; you fancy you are being very clever, but you will find out the truth in time."

"Not without external assistance, I'm afraid," said Paradine, calmly. "A more awful little liar for your age I never saw—don't you think you can lie pretty well yourself?"

"I'm tired of this," said Paul. "Only listen to reason and common sense."

"Only give me a chance."

"I tell you," protested Paul, earnestly, "it's the sober, awful truth—I'm not a boy; it's years since I was a boy; I'm a middle-aged man, thrust into this—this humiliating form!"

"Don't say that," murmured the other; "it's an excellent fit—very becoming, I assure you."

"Do you want to drive me mad with your clumsy jeers?" cried Paul. "Look at me. Do I speak, do I behave, like an ordinary schoolboy?"

"I really hope not—for the sake of the rising generation," said Uncle Marmaduke, chuckling at his own powers of repartee.

"You are very jaunty to-day; you look as if you were well off," said Paul, slowly. "I remember a time when a certain bill was presented to me, drawn by you, and appearing to be accepted (long before I ever saw it) by me. I consented to meet it for my poor Maria's sake, and because to disown my signature would have ruined you for life. Do you remember how

you went down on your knees in my private room and swore you would reform and be a credit to your family yet? You weren't quite so well off, or so jaunty then, unless I am very much mistaken."

These words had an extraordinary effect upon Uncle Marmaduke; he turned ashy white, and his quick eyes shifted restlessly as he half rose from his chair and threw away his unfinished cigar.

"You young hound!" he said, breathing hard and speaking under his breath. "How did you get hold of that—that lying story? Your father must have let it out! Why do you bring up bygones like this? You—you're a confounded, disagreeable little prig! Who told you to play an ill-natured trick of this sort on an uncle, who may have been wild and reckless in his youth—was, in fact—but who never, never misused his relation toward you as—as an uncle?"

"How did I get hold of the story?" said Paul, observing the impression he had made. "Do you think if I were really a boy of thirteen I should know as much about you as I do? Do you want to know more? Ask, if you dare! Shall I tell you how it was you left your army-coach without going up for examination? Will you have the story of your career in my old friend Parkinson's counting-house, or the real reason of your trip to New York, or what it was that made your father add that codicil, cutting you off with a set of engravings of the 'Rake's Progress,' and a guinea to pay for framing them? I can tell you all about it, if you care to hear."

"No!" shrieked Paradine, "I won't listen. When you grow up, ask your father to buy you a society journal! You're cut out for an editor of one. It doesn't interest me."

"Do you believe my story or not?" asked Paul.

"I don't know. Who could believe it?" said the other, sullenly. "How can you possibly account for it?"

"Do you remember giving Maria a little sandal-wood box with a small stone in it?" said Paul.

"I have some recollection of giving her something of that kind. A curiosity, wasn't it?"

"I wish I had never seen it. That infernal stone, Paradine, has done all this to me. Did no one tell you it was supposed to have any magic power."

"Why, now I think of it, that old black rascal, Bindabun Doss, did try to humbug me with some such story, said it was believed to be a talisman, but the secret was lost. I thought it was just his stingy way of trying to make the rubbish out as something priceless, as it ought to have been, considering all I did for the old ruffian."

"You told Maria it was a talisman. Bindabun what's-his-

name was right. It is a talisman of the deadliest sort. I'll soon convince you if you will hear me out."

And then, in white-hot wrath and indignation, Mr. Bultitude began to tell the story I have already attempted to sketch here, dwelling bitterly on Dick's heartless selfishness and cruelty, and piteously on his own incredible sufferings, while Uncle Marmaduke, lolling back in his arm-chair, with an attempt (which was soon abandoned) to retain a smile of amused skepticism on his face, heard him out in complete silence and with all due gravity.

Indeed, Paul's manner left him no room for further unbelief. His tale, wild and improbable as it was, was too consistent and elaborate for any schoolboy to have invented, and, besides, the imposture would have been so entirely purposeless.

When his brother-in-law had come to the end of his sad history, Paradine was silent for some time. It was some relief to know that the darkest secrets of his life had not been ferreted out by a phenomenally sharp nephew; but the change in the situation was not without its drawbacks; it remained to be seen how it might affect himself. He already saw his reign in Westbourne Terrace threatened with a speedy determination, unless he played his cards well.

"Well," he said at last, with a swift, keen glance at Paul, who sat anxiously waiting for his next words, "suppose I were to say that I think there may be something in this story of yours, what then? What is it you want me to do for you?"

"Why," said Paul, "with all you owe to me, now you know the horrible injustice I have had to bear, you surely don't mean to say that you won't help me to right myself?"

"And if I did help you, what then?"

"Why, I should be able to recover all I have lost, of course," said Mr. Bultitude. He thought his brother-in-law had grown very dull.

"Ah, but I mean, what's to become of me?"

"You?" repeated Paul (he had not thought of that). "Well, hum, from what I know and what you know that I know about your past life, you can't expect me to encourage you to remain here?"

"No," said Uncle Marmaduke. "Of course not; very right and proper."

"But," said Paul, willing to make all reasonable concessions, "anything I can do to advance your prospects—such as paying your passage out to New York, you know, and so on—I should be very ready to do."

"Thank you!" said the other.

"And even, if necessary, provide you with a small fund to

start afresh upon. Honestly," said Paul, "you will not find me difficult to deal with."

"It's a dazzling proposition," remarked Paradine, dryly. "You have such an alluring way of putting things. But the fact is, you'll hardly believe it, but I'm remarkably well off here. I am indeed. Your son, you know, though not you (except as a mere matter of form), really makes, as they say of the marmalade in the advertisements, an admirable substitute. I doubt, I do assure you, whether you yourself would have received me with quite the same warmth and hospitality I have met with from him."

"So do I," said Paul; "very much."

"Just so; for, without your admirable business capacity and extraordinary firmness of character, you know, he has, if you'll excuse my saying so, a more open, guileless nature, a more entire and touching faith in his fellow-man and brother-in-law, than were ever yours."

"To say that to me," said Paul, hotly, "is nothing less than sheer impudence."

"My dear Paul (it does seem deuced odd to be talking to a little shrimp like you as a grown-up brother-in-law. I shall get used to it presently, I daresay). I flatter myself I am a man of the world. We're dealing with one another now, as the lawyers have it, at arm's length. Just put yourself in my place (you're so remarkably good at putting yourself in other people's places, you know). Look at the thing from my point of view. Accidentally dropping in at your offices to negotiate (if I could) a small temporary loan from any one I chanced to meet on the premises, I find myself, to my surprise, welcomed with effusion into what I then imagined to be your arms. More than that, I was invited here for an indefinite time, all my little eccentricities unmentioned, overlooked. I was deeply touched (it struck me, I confess, at one time that you must be touched too), but I made the best use of my opportunities. I made hay while the sun shone."

"Do you mean to make me lose my temper?" interrupted Paul. "It will not take much more."

"I have no objection. I find men as a rule easier to deal with when they have once lost their temper, their heads so often go too. But to return: a man with nerve and his fair share of brains, like myself, only wants a capitalist (he need not be a millionaire) at his back to conquer the world. It's not by any means my first campaign, and I've had reverses, but I see victory in my grasp, sir, in my grasp at last!"

Paul groaned.

"Now you—it's not your fault, I know, a mere defect of constitution—but you, as a speculator, were, if I may venture to

put it so, not worth your salt; no boldness, no dash, all caution. But your promising son is a regular whale on speculation, and I may tell you that we stand in together in some little ventures that would very probably make your hair stand on end—you wouldn't have touched them. And yet there's money in every one of them."

"I daresay there is," said Paul, savagely; "I won't have any of *my* money in them."

"You don't know much about these things, you see," said Marmaduke; "I tell you I have my eye on some fine openings for capital."

Your pockets always were very fine openings for capital," retorted Paul.

"Ha! ha! deuced sharp that! But, to come to the point, you were always a sensible, practical kind of a fellow, and you must see that, for me to back you up and upset this young rascal, who has stepped into your slippers, might be morally meritorious enough, but, treating it from a pecuniary point of view, it's not business."

"I see," said Mr. Bultitude, heavily; "then you side against me?"

"Did I ever say I would side against you? Let us hear first what you propose to do."

Paul, upon this, explained that, as he believed the stone still retained its power of granting one wish to any other person who happened to get hold of it, his idea was to get possession of it somehow from Dick, who would probably have it about him somewhere, and then to pass it on to some one whom he could trust not to misuse it so basely.

"A good idea that, Paul, my boy," said Paradine, smiling; "but you don't imagine our young friend would be quite such an idiot as not to see your game! Why, he would pitch the stone in the gutter, and stamp it to powder, rather than let you get hold of it."

"He's quite capable of it," said Paul; in fact, he threatened to do worse than that. I doubt if I shall ever be able to manage it myself; but what am I to do? I must try, and I've no time to lose about it either."

"I tell you this," said Marmaduke, "if you let him see you here, it's all up with you. What you want is some friend to manage this for you—some one he won't suspect. Now, suppose I were willing to risk it for you?"

"You!" cried Paul, with involuntary distrust.

"Why not?" said Marmaduke, with a touch of feeling. "Ah, I see, you can't trust me. You've got an idea into your head that I'm a thorough-paced rascal. without a trace of human feeling about me. I daresay I deserve it; I daresay I do; but

it's not generous, my boy, for all that. I hope to show you your mistake yet, if you give me the chance. You allow yourself to be prejudiced by the past; that's where you make your mistake. I only put before you clearly and plainly what it was I was giving up in helping you. A fellow may have a hard, cynical kind of way of putting things, and yet, take my word for it, Paul, have a heart as tender as a spring chicken underneath. I tell you I'm sorry for you. I don't like to see a family man of your position in such a regular deuce of a hole. I feel bound to give you a lift out of it, and let my prospects take their own chance. I leave the gratitude to you. When I've done, kick me down the doorsteps if you like. I shall go out into the world with a glow of self-approval (and rapid motion) warming my system. Take my advice—don't attempt to tackle Master Dick yourself. Leave him to me."

"If I could only make up my mind to trust you!" muttered Paul.

"The old distrust," cried Marmaduke; "you can't forget. You won't believe a poor devil like me can have any gratitude, any disinterestedness left in him. Never mind, I'll go. I'll leave it to you. I'll send Dick in here, and we shall see whether he's such a fool as you think him."

"No," said Paul, "no; I feel you're right; that would never do."

"It would be for my advantage, I think," said the other; "but you had better take me while I am in a magnanimous mood; the opportunity may never occur again. Come, am I to help you or not? Yes or no?"

"I must accept," said Paul, reluctantly. "I can't find Boaler now, and it might take hours to make him see what I wanted. I'll trust to your honor. What shall I do?"

"Do? Get away from this; he'll be coming in here very soon to see me. Run away and play with the children or hide in the china closet—anything but stay here."

"I—I must be here while you are managing him," objected Paul.

"Nonsense!" said Paradine, angrily. "I tell you it will spoil all, unless you—who's that? it's his step—too late now—dash it all! Behind that screen, quick—don't move for your life till I tell you you may come out!"

Mr. Bultitude had no choice; there was just time to set up an old folding screen which stood in a corner of the room and slip behind it before the door opened.

It might not be the highest wisdom to trust everything to his new ally in this manner; but what else could he do, except stand by in forced inactivity while the momentous duel was being fought out? Just then, at all events, he saw no other course.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RUN TO EARTH.

"The is noon in this hous schuld bynde me this night."
—*The Coke's Tale of Gamelyn.*

Dick burst open the door of the billiard-room rather suddenly, and then stood holding on to the handle and smiling down upon his relative in a happy and affectionate but rather weak manner.

"So here you are!" he said. "Been looking for you everywhere What's good of shutting 'self in here? Come up and play gamesh. No? Come in and have shupper. I've had shupper."

"So I perceive," observed Uncle Marmaduke; and the fact was certainly obvious enough.

"Tell y' what I did," giggled the wretched Dick. "You know I never did get what I call regular good blow out—always some one to shay 'had quite 'nough' 'fore I'd begun. So I thought this time I would have a tuck-in till—till I felt tired, and I—he-he-he—I got down 'fore anybody elsh and helped myshelf. Had first go-in. No one to help to thingsh. No girlsh to bother. It was prime! When they've all gone up again you and me 'll go in and have shome more, eh?"

"You're a model host," said his uncle.

"It's a good shupper," Dick went on. "I ought to know. I've had some of everything. It'sh almost too good for kids. But it'sh a good thing I went in first. After I'd been in a little time I saw a sponge-cake on the table, and when I tried it, what d'ye think I found? It was as full inside of brandy-an'-sherry as it could be. All it could do to shtand! I saw d'rectly it washn't in condition come to table, and I said: 'Take it away! take it away! It'sh drunk; it'sh a dishgraceful sight for children!' But they wouldn't take it away; sho I had to take it away. But you can't take away a whole tipshy-cake!"

"I am quite sure you did your best," murmured Paradine.

"Been having such gamesh up-stairs!" said Dick, with another giggle. "That lil' Dolly Merridew's jolly girl. Not sho nice as Dulcie, though. Why didn' we invite Dulcie? I wanted them to invite Dulcie. Here, you, let'sh go up and let off fireworksh on balcony, eh? Let'sh have jolly lark!"

"No, no," said his uncle. "You and I are too old for that sort of thing. You should leave the larks to the young fellows."

"How do you know I'm too old for sorterthing?" said Dick, with an offended air.

"Well, you're not a young man any longer, you know. You ought to behave like the steady old buffer you look."

"Why?" demanded Dick; "why should I behave like shteady ole buffer, when I don' feel shteady ole buffer? What do you want shpoil fun for? Tell you I shall do jus' zackly wharri-please. And, if you shay any more, I'll punch y' head!"

"No, no," said his uncle, slightly alarmed at this intimation. "Come, you're not going to quarrel with me, I'm sure!"

"All ri'," said Dick. "No; I won' quarrel. Don' wanter quarrel anybody."

"That's right," said Paradine. "I knew you were a noble fellow!"

"Sho I am," said Dick, shaking hands with effusion. "Sho are you. Nearly ash noble 'sh me. There, you're jolly good fellow. I say, I've goo' mind tell you something. Make you laugh, But I won't; not now."

"Oh, you can tell me," said Marmaduke. "No secrets between friends, you know."

"Sha'n't tell you now," said Dick. "Keep shecret little longer."

"Do you know, my friend, that there's something very odd about you I've noticed lately! Something that makes me almost fancy sometimes you're not what you pretend to be."

Dick sat down heavily on one of the leather benches placed against the wall.

"Eh, what shay?" he gasped. "Say tharragain."

"You look to me," said Marmaduke, slowly, "like some one excellently made up for the part of heavy father, without a notion how to play it. Dick, you young dog, you see I know you! You can't take me in with all this. You'd better tell me all about it."

Dick seemed almost sobered by this shock.

"You've found me out," he repeated, dully. "Then it's all up. If you've found me out, everybody else can find me out!"

"No, no; it's not so bad as that, my boy. I've better eyes than most people, and then I had the privilege of knowing your excellent father rather well once upon a time. You haven't studied his little peculiarities closely enough; but you'll improve. By the way, where *is* your excellent father all this time?"

"He's all right," said Dick, beginning to chuckle. "He-he. He's at school, he is!"

"At school! You mean to say you've put him to school at his time of his life? He's rather old for that sort of thing, isn't he? They don't take him on the ordinary terms, do they?"

"Ah," said Dick, "that'sh where it is. He isn't old, you see, now, to look at. I took care of all that."

"Not old to look at! Then how on earth—— I should like to know how you managed all that. What have you been doing to the old gentleman?"

"That'sh my affair," said Dick. "An' if I don' tell you, you won' find that out, anyway."

"There's only one way you could have done it," said Paradine, pretending to hesitate. "It must have been done by some meddling with magic. Now what—— Let me see—yes—— Surely the stone I brought your poor mother from India was given to me as a talisman of some sort? You surely can't have been sharp enough to get hold of that!"

"How did you know?" cried Dick, sharply. "Who told you?"

"I am right then? Well, you are a clever fellow. I should like to know how you did it, now?"

"Did it with the shtone," said Dick, evidently discomposed by such unexpected penetration, but unable to prevent a little natural complacency. "All my own idea. No one helped me. It—it washn't sho bad for me, wash it?"

"Bad! it was capital!" cried Marmaduke, enthusiastically. "It was a stroke of genius. And so my Indian stone has done all this for you. Sounds like an Arabian Night, by Jove! By the by, you don't happen to have it about you, do you? I should rather like to look at it again. It's a real curiosity after this."

Paul trembled with anxiety. Would Dick be induced to part with it? If so, he was saved. But Dick looked at his uncle's outstretched hand, and wagged his head with tipsy cunning.

"I dare say you would," he said, "but I'm not sho green as all that. Don't let that stone out of my hands for any one."

"Why, I only wanted to look at it for a minute or two," said Marmaduke; "I wouldn't hurt it or lose it."

"You won't get chance," said Dick.

"Oh, very well," said Paradine, carelessly, "just as you please, it doesn't matter; though, when we come to talk things over a little, you may find it better to trust me more than that."

"Wha' do you mean?" said Dick, uneasily.

"Well, I'll try to explain as well as I can, my boy (drink a little of this soda-water first; it's an excellent thing after supper); there, you're better now, aren't you? Now, I've found you out, as you see; but only because I knew something of the powers of this stone of yours, and guessed the rest. It doesn't at all follow that other people, who know nothing at all, will be as sharp; if you're more careful about your behavior in future

—unless, unless, young fellow——" and here he paused meaningly.

"Unless what?" asked Dick, suspiciously.

"Unless I chose to tell them what I've found out."

"What would you tell them?" said Dick.

"What? Why, what I know of this talisman; tell them to use their eyes; they wouldn't be very long before they found out that something was wrong. And when one or two of your father's friends once get hold of the idea, your game will be very soon over; you know that as well as I do."

"But," stammered Dick, "you wouldn't go and do beastly mean thing like that? I've not been bad fellow to you."

"The meanness, my dear boy, depends entirely upon the view you take of it. Now, the question with me, as a man of honor—and I may tell you an over-nice sense of honor has been a drawback I've had to struggle against all my life—the question with me is this: Is it not my plain duty to step in and put a stop to this topsy-turvy state of things, to show you up as the bare-faced young imposter you are, and restore my unhappy brother-in-law to his proper position?"

"Very well expressed," thought Paul, who had been getting uncomfortable; "he has a heart, as he said, after all!"

"How does that seem to strike you?" added Paradine.

"It shtrikes me as awful rot," said Dick, with refreshing candor.

"It's the language of conscience, but I don't expect you to see it in the same light. I don't mind confessing to you, either, that I'm a poor devil to whom money and a safe and respectable position (all of which I have here) are great considerations. But whenever I see the finger of duty and honor, and family affection, all beckoning me along a particular road, I make a point of obeying their monitions—occasionally. I don't mean to say that I never have bolted down a back way instead, when it was made worth my while, or that I never will."

"I wonder what he's driving at now," thought Paul.

"I don't know about duty and honor, and all that," said Dick. "My head aches; it's the noise they're making up stairs. Are you goin' to tell?"

"The fact is, my dear boy, that when one has had a keen sense of honor in constant use for several years, it's like most other articles—apt to become a little the worse for wear. Mine is not what it used to be, Dicky (that's your name, isn't it?). Our powers fail as we grow old."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" said Dick, helplessly. "Do tell me what you mean to do?"

"Well, then, your head's clear enough to understand this much, I hope," said Paradine, a little impatiently; "that, if I

did my duty and exposed you, you wouldn't be able to keep up the farce for a single hour, in spite of all your personal advantages; you know that, don't you?"

"I shpose I know that," said Dick, feebly.

"You know, too, that if I could be induced—mind, I don't say I can—to hold my tongue, and stay on here and look after you, and keep you from betraying yourself by any more of these schoolboy follies, there's not much fear that any one else will ever find out the secret——"

"Which are you going to do, then?" said Dick.

"Suppose I say that I like you, that you have shown me more kindness in a single week than ever your respectable father has since I first made his acquaintance. Suppose I say that I am willing to let the sense of honor and duty, and all the rest of it, go overboard together; that we two together are a match for papa, wherever he may be, and whatever he chooses to say and do?"

There was a veiled defiance in his voice that seemed meant for more than Dick, and alarmed Mr. Bultitude; however, he tried to calm his uneasiness, and persuade himself that it was a part of the plot.

"Will you say that?" cried Dick, excitedly.

"On one condition, which I'll tell you by and by. Yes, I'll stand by you, my boy; I'll coach you till I make you a man of business every bit as good as your father, and a much better man of the world. I'll show you how to realize a colossal fortune, if you only take my advice. And we'll pack papa off to some place abroad where he'll have no holidays and give no trouble."

"No," said Dick, firmly; "I won't have that. After all, he's my governor."

"Do what you like with him, then; he can't do much harm. I tell you, I'll do all this, on one condition—it's a very simple one——"

"What is it?" asked Dick.

"This. You have, somewhere or other, the Stone that has done all this for you—you may have it about you at this moment—ah!" (as Dick made a sudden movement toward his white waistcoat) "I thought so! Well, I want that Stone. You were afraid to leave it in my hands for a minute or two just now; you must trust me with it altogether."

Paul was relieved; of course this was merely an artifice to recover the Garudâ Stone, and Marmaduke was not playing him false after all; he waited breathlessly for Dick's answer.

"No," said Dick, "I can't do that; I want it, too."

"Why, man, what use is it to you? It only gives you one wish; you can't use it again."

Dick mumbled something about his being ill, and Barbara wishing him well again.

"I suppose I can do that as well as Barbara," said his uncle. "Come, don't be obstinate; give me the Stone; it's very important that it should be in safe hands."

"No," said Dick, obstinately; he was fumbling all the time irresolutely in his pockets; "I mean to keep it myself."

"Very well, then, I have done with you. To-morrow morning I shall step up to Mincing Lane, and then to your father's solicitor. I think his offices are in Bedford Row, but I can easily find out at your father's place. After that, young man, you'll have a very short time to amuse yourself in, so make the best of it."

"No, don't leave me; let me alone for a minute," pleaded Dick, still fumbling.

At this a sudden suspicion of his brother-in-law's motives for wishing to get the Stone into his own hands overcame all Paul's prudence. If he was so clever in deceiving Dick, might he not be cheating him, too, just as completely? He could wait no longer, but burst from behind the screen and rushed in between the pair.

"Go back!" screamed Paradine. "You infernal old idiot, you've ruined everything!"

"I won't go back," said Paul. "I don't believe in you. I'll hide no longer. Dick, I forbid you to trust that man."

Dick had risen in horror at the sudden apparition, and staggered back against the wall, where he stood staring stupidly at his unfortunate father with fixed and vacant eyes.

"Badly as you've treated me, I'd rather trust you than that shifty, plausible fellow there. Just look at me, Dick, and then say if you can let this cruelty go on. If you knew all I've suffered since I have been among those infernal boys, you would pity me, you would indeed. . . . If you send me back there again, it will kill me. . . . You know as well as I do that it is worse for me than ever it could be for you. . . . You can't really justify yourself because of a thoughtless wish of mine, spoken without the least intention of being taken at my word. Dick, I may not have shown as much affection for you as I might have done, but I don't think I deserve all this. Be generous with me now, and I swear you will never regret it.

Dick's lips moved; there really was something like pity and repentence in his face, muddled and dazed as his general expression was by his recent over-indulgence, but he said nothing.

"Give papa the Stone by all means, sneered Paradine. "If you do, he will find some one to wish the pair of you back again,

and then, back you go to school again, the laughing-stock of everybody, you silly young cub!"

"Don't listen to him, Dick," urged Paul. "Give it to me, for heaven's sake; if you let him have it, he'll use it to ruin us all.

But Dick turned his white face to the rival claimants, and said, getting the words out with difficulty: "Papa, I'm shorry. It is a shame. If I had the Shtone, I really would give it you, upon my word-an'-honor I would. But—but, now I can never give it up to you. It'sh gone. Losht!"

"Lost!" cried Marmaduke. "When—where? When do you last recollect seeing it? You must know."

"In the morning," said Dick, twirling his chain, where part of the cheap gilt fastening still hung. "No; afternoon. I don't know," he added, helplessly.

Paul sank down on a chair with a heart-broken groan. A moment ago he had felt himself very near his goal; he had regained something of his old influence over Dick; he had actually managed to touch his heart—and now it was all in vain!

Paradine's jaw fell; he, too, had had his dreams of doing wonderful things with the talisman after he had cajoled Dick to part with it. Whether the restoration of his brother-in-law formed any part of his programme, it is better, perhaps, not to inquire. His dreams were scattered now; the Stone might be anywhere —buried in London mud, lying on railway ballast, or ground to powder by cart-wheels. There was little chance, indeed, that even the most liberal rewards would lead to discovery. He swore long and comprehensively.

As for Mr. Bultitude, he sat motionless in his chair, staring in dull, speechless reproach at the conscience-stricken Dick, who stood in the corner blinking and whimpering with an abject penitence, odd and painful to see in one of his portly form. The children had now apparently finished supper, for there were sounds above as of dancing, and "Sir Roger de Coverley," with its rollicking, never-wearying repetition, was distinctly audible above the din and laughter. Once before—a week ago that very day—had that heartless piano mocked him with its untimely gayety.

But things were not at their worst even yet, for, while they sat like this, there was a sharp, short peal at the house-bell, followed by loud and rather angry knocking, for, carriages being no longer expected, the servants and waiters had now closed the front door, and left the passage for the supper-room.

"The visitors' bell!" cried Paul, roused from his apathy; and he rushed to the window which commanded a side-view of the portico; it might be only a servant calling for one of the children, but he feared the worst, and could not rest till he knew it.

It was a rash thing to do, for, as he drew the blind, he saw a large person in a heavy Inverness cloak standing on the steps, and (which was worse) the person saw him and recognized him.

With fascinated horror, Mr. Bultitude saw the doctor's small gray eyes fixed angrily on him, and knew that he was hunted down at last.

He turned to the other two with a sort of ghastly composure: "It's all over now," he said. "I've just seen Dr. Grimstone standing on my door-step; he has come after me."

Uncle Marmaduke gave a malicious little laugh. "I'm sorry for you, my friend," he said, "but I really can't help it."

"You can," said Paul; "you can tell him what you know. You can save me."

"Very poor economy that," said Marmaduke, airily. "I prefer spending to saving—always did. I have my own interests to consider, my dear Paul."

"Dick," said poor Mr. Bultitude, disgusted at this exhibition of selfishness, "you said you were sorry just now. Will you tell him the truth?"

But Dick was quite unnerved; he cowered away, almost crying.

"I daren't, I daren't," he stammered; "I—I can't go back to the fellows like this. I'm afraid to tell him. I—I wan't to hide somewhere."

And certainly he was in no condition to convince and angry schoolmaster of anything whatever, except that he was in a state very unbecoming to the head of a family.

It was all over; Paul saw that too well; he dashed frantically from the fatal billiard-room, and in the hall met Boaler preparing to admit the visitor.

"Don't open the door!" he screamed. "Keep him out; you mustn't let him in. It's Dr. Grimstone."

Boaler, surprised as he naturally was at his young master's unaccountable appearance and evident panic, nevertheless never moved a muscle of his face; he was one of those perfectly bred servants who, if they chanced to open the door to a ghoul or skeleton, would merely inquire, "What name, if you please?"

"I must go and ask your par then, Master Dick; there's time to 'ook it up stairs while I'm gone. I won't say nothing," he added, compassionately.

Paul lost no time in following this suggestion, but rushed upstairs, two or three steps at a time, stumbling at every flight, with a hideous nightmare feeling that some invisible thing behind was trying to trip up his heels.

He rushed blindly past the conservatory, which was lit up by Chinese lanterns, and crowded with "little Kate Greenaway" maidens crowned with fantastic head-dresses out of the crackers, and comparing presents with boy-lovers; he upset perspiring

waiters with glasses and trays, and scattered the children sitting on the stairs, as he bounded on in his reckless flight, leaving crashes of glass behind him.

He had no clear idea of what he meant to do; he thought of barricading himself in his bedroom and hiding in the wardrobe; he had desperate notions of getting on to the housetop by means of a step-ladder and the skylight above the nursery landing; on one point he was resolved — he would not be retaken *alive!*

Never before in this commonplace London world of ours was an unfortunate householder hunted up his own staircase in this distressing manner; even his terror did not blind him to the extreme ignominy and injustice of his position.

And below he heard the bell ringing more and more impatiently, as the doctor still remained on the wrong side of the door. In another minute he must be admitted—and then!

Who will not sympathize with Mr. Bultitude as he approaches the crisis of his misfortunes? I protest, for my own part, that, as I am compelled to describe him springing from step to step in wild terror, like a highly respectable chamois before some Alpine marksman, my own heart bleeds for him, and I hasten to end my distressing tale and make the rest of it as little painful as I may with honesty.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RECKONING.

"Montr. The father is victorious.
Belf. Let us haste
To gratulate his conquest.
1st Capt. We to mourn
The fortune of the son."

Massinger, *The Unnaturul Combat.*

Poor Mr. Bultitude, springing wildly up stairs in a last desperate effort to avoid capture, had now almost reached his goal. Just above him was the nursery landing, with its little wooden gate, and near it, leaning against the wall, was the pair of kitchen steps, with which he had hopes of reaching the roof, or the cistern loft, or some other safe and inaccessible place. Better a night spent on the slates among the chimney-pots than a bed in that terrible No 6. Dormitory.

But here, too, fate was against him. He was not more than

half a dozen steps from the top when, to his unspeakable horror, he saw a small form in a white frock and cardinal-red sash come running out of the nursery, and begin to descend slowly and cautiously, clinging to the banisters with one chubby little hand.

It was his youngest son, Roly, and as soon as he saw this he lost hope once and for all; he could not escape being recognized; the child would probably refuse to leave him, and, even if he did contrive to get away from him, it would be hopeless to make Roly understand that he was not to betray his hiding-place.

So he stopped on the stairs, aghast at this new misfortune, and feeling himself at the end of all his resources. Roly knew him at once, and began to dance delightedly up and down on the stair in his little bronze shoes. "Buzzer Dicky," he cried, "dear buzzer Dicky, tum 'ome to party!"

"It's not brother Dicky," said Paul, miserably; "it's all a mistake."

"Oh, but it is, though," said Roly; "and you don't know what Roly's found."

"No no," said Paul, trying to pass (which, as Roly persisted in leaping joyously from side to side of the narrow stair, was difficult); "you shall show me another time. I'm in a hurry, my boy, I've got an appointment."

"Roly's got something better than that," observed the child.

Mr. Bultitude, in spite of his terror, was too much afraid of hurting him by brushing roughly past to attempt such a thing, so he tried diplomacy. "Well, what has Roly found, a cracker?"

"No, no, better than a cwacker—you guess."

"I can't guess," said Paul; "never mind, I don't want to know."

"Well, then," said Roly, "there." And he slowly unclosed a fat little fist, and in it Paul saw, with a revulsion of feeling that turned him dizzy and faint, the priceless talisman itself, the identical Garudâ Stone, with part of the gilt ring still attached to it.

The fastening had probably given way during Master Dick's uproarious revels in the drawing-room, and Roly must have picked it up on the carpet shortly afterward.

"Isn't it a pitty sing?" said Roly insisting that his treasure should be duly admired.

"A very pretty thing," said his father, hoarse and panting; "but it's mine, Roly; it's mine."

And he tried to snatch it, but Roly closed his fist over it, and ponted. "It isn't yours," he said, "it's Roly's. Roly found it."

Paul's fears rose again; would he be wrecked in port, after

all? His ear, unnaturally strained, caught the sound of the front-door being opened; he heard the doctor's deep voice booming faintly below, then the noise of persons ascending.

"Roly shall have it," he said, perfidiously, "if he will say after me what I tell him. Say, 'I wish papa and brother Dick back as they were before,' Roly."

"Ith it a game?" asked Roly, his face clearing, and evidently delighted with his eccentric brother, Dick, who had run all the way home from school to play games with him on the staircase.

"No—yes!" cried Paul, "it's a very funny game; only do what I tell you. Now say: 'I wish papa and brother Dick back again as they were before.' I'll give you a sugar-plum if you say it nicely."

"What sort of sugar-plum?" demanded Roly, who inherited business instincts.

"Any sort you like best," almost shrieked Paul; "oh, do get on."

"Lots of sugar-plums, then. 'I wish '—I forget what you told me—oh! 'I with papa and——' there'th thomebody tumming up sthairs!" he broke off suddenly; "it'h nurth tummin' to put me to bed. I don't want to go to bed yet."

"And you sha'n't go to bed!" cried Paul, for he, too, thought he heard some one. "Never mind nurse; finish the—the game."

"'Papa and buzzy Dicky back again as—as they were before,'" repeated Roly at last. "What a funny—ow, ow, it'h papa! it'h papa! and he told me it wath Dicky. I'm afraid, Whereth Dicky gone to? I want Bab, take me to Bab."

For the stone had done it's work once more, and this time with happier results; with a supreme relief and joy, which no one who has read this book can fail to understand, Mr. Bultitude felt that he actually was his own self again.

Just when all hope seemed cut off and relief was most unlikely, the magic spell that had caused him such intolerable misery for one hideous week was reversed by the hand of an innocent child.

He caught Roly up in his arms and kissed him as he had never been kissed in his whole life before, at least by his father, and comforting him as well as he could, for the poor child had naturally received rather a severe shock, he stepped airily down the staircase, which he had mounted with such different emotions five minutes before.

On his way, he could not resist going into his dressing-room and assuring himself by a prolonged examination before the cheval-glass that the stone had not played him some last piece of jugglery; but he found everything quite correct; he was the same formal, precise and portly old gentleman, wearing the

same morning dress, even as on that other Monday evening, and he went on with greater confidence.

He took care, however, to stop at the first window, when he managed, after some coaxing, to persuade Roly to give up the Garudâ Stone. As soon as he had it in his hands again, he opened the window wide and flung the dangerous talisman far out into the darkness. Not till then did he feel perfectly secure.

He passed the groups of little guests gathered about the conservatory, and lower down he met Boaler, the nurse, and one or two servants and waiters, rushing up in a state of great anxiety and flurry; even Boaler's usual composure seemed shaken. "Please, sir," he asked, "the schoolmaster gentleman, Master Dick—he've run up-stairs; haven't you seen him?"

Paul had almost forgotten Dick in his new happiness; there would be a heavy score to settle with him; he had the upper hand once more, and yet, somehow, he did not feel as much righteous wrath and desire for revenge as he had expected to do.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, waving them back with more benignity than they thought he had in him. "Master Dick is safe enough. I know all about it. Where is Dr. Grimstone? In the library, eh? very well, I will see him there."

And, leaving Roly with the nurse, he went down to the library; not, if the truth must be told, without a slight degree of nervousness, unreasonable and unaccountable enough now, but quite beyond his power to control.

He entered the room, and there, surrounded by piles of ticketed hats and coats, under the pale light of one gas-burner, he saw the terrible man, before whom he had trembled for the last seven horrible days.

A feeling of self-defense made Paul assume rather more than his old stiffness as he shook hands. "I am very glad to see you, Dr. Grimstone," he said, "but your coming at this time forces me to ask if there is any unusual reason for—for my having the—a—pleasure of seeing you here?"

"I am exceedingly distressed to have to say that there is," said the doctor, solemnly, "or I should not have troubled you at this hour. Try to compose yourself, my dear sir, to bear this blow."

"I will," said Paul, "I will try."

"The fact is, then, and I know how sad a story it must be for a parent's ear, but the fact is, that your unhappy boy has had the inconceivable rashness to quit my roof." And the doctor paused to watch the effect of his announcement.

"God bless my soul!" cried Paul. "You don't say so!"

"I do, indeed; he has, in short, run away. But don't be alarmed, my dear Mr. Bultitude; I think I can assure you he is

quite safe at the present moment." ("Thank heaven, he is!" thought Paul, thinking of his own marvelous escape). "I should certainly have recaptured him before he could have left the railway station, where he seemed to have gone at once, only, acting on information (which I strongly suspect now was intentionally misleading), I drove on to the station on the up-line, thinking to find him there. He was not there, sir; I believe he never went there at all; but, guessing how matters were, I searched the train, carriage by carriage, compartment by compartment, when it came up."

"I am very sorry you should have had so much trouble," said Paul, with a vivid recollection of the exploring stick; "and so you found him?"

"No, sir," said the doctor, passionately, "I did not find him, but he was there; he must have been there! but the shameless connivance of two excessively ill-bred persons, who positively refused to allow me access to their compartment, caused him to slip through my fingers."

Mr. Bultitude observed, rather ungratefully, that, if this was so, it was a most improper thing for them to do.

"It was, indeed, but it is of no consequence, fortunately. I was forced to wait for the next train; but that was not a very slow one, and so I was able to come on here before a very late hour and acquaint you with what had taken place."

"Thank you very much," said Paul.

"It's a painful thing to occur in a school," observed the doctor, after a pause.

"Most unfortunate," agreed Paul, coughing.

"So apt to lead persons who are not acquainted with the facts to imagine that the boy was unhappy under my care," continued the doctor.

"In this case, I assure you, I have no doubts," protested Paul with politeness and (seldom a possible combination) perfect truth.

"Very kind of you to say so; really, it's a great mystery to me. I certainly, as I felt it my duty to inform you at the time, came very near inflicting corporal punishment upon him this morning—very near. But then he was pardoned on your intercession; and, besides, the boy would never have run away for fear of a flogging."

"Oh, no, perfectly absurd!" agreed Paul again.

"Such a merry, high-spirited lad, too," said the doctor, sincerely enough; "popular with his schoolfellows; a favorite (in spite of his faults) with his teachers."

"No, was he though?" said Paul, with more surprise, for he had not been fortunate enough to reap much vicarious benefit from his son's popularity, as he could not help remembering.

"All this, added to the comforts (or, may I say, the luxuries?) he enjoyed under my supervision, does make it seem very strange and ungrateful in the boy to take this sudden and ill-considered step."

"Very, indeed; but do you know, Dr. Grimstone, I can't help thinking—and pray do not misunderstand me if I speak plainly—that, perhaps, he had reasons for being unhappy you can have no idea of?"

"He would have found me ready to hear any complaints and prompt to redress them, sir," said the doctor. "But, now I think of it, he certainly did appear to have something on his mind which he wished to tell me; but his manner was so strange, and he so persistently refused to come to the point, that I was forced to discourage him at last."

"You did discourage him, indeed!" said Paul, inwardly, thinking of those attempted confidences with a shudder. "Perhaps some of his schoolfellows may have—eh?" he said aloud.

"My dear sir," exclaimed the doctor, "quite out of the question!"

"Do you think so?" said Paul, not being able to resist the suggestion. "And yet, do you know, some of them did not appear to me to look very—very good-natured, now."

"A more manly, pleasant, and gentlemanly set of youths never breathed!" said the doctor, taking up the cudgels for his boys, and, to do him justice, probably with full measure of belief in his statement. "Curious now that they should have struck you so differently!"

"They certainly did strike me very differently," said Paul. "But I may be mistaken."

"You are, my dear sir. And, pardon me, but you had no opportunity of testing your opinion."

"Oh, pardon me," retorted Paul, grimly, "I had, indeed!"

"A cursory visit," said the doctor, "a formal inspection—you cannot fairly judge boys by that. They will naturally be reserved and constrained in the presence of an elder. But you should observe them without their knowledge—you want to know them, my dear Mr. Bultitude, you want to go among them!"

It was the very last thing Paul did want—he knew them quite well enough; but it was of no use to say so, and he merely assented politely.

"And now," said the doctor, "with regard to your misguided boy. I have to tell you that he is here, in this very house. I tracked him here, and, ten minutes ago, saw him with my own eyes at one of your windows."

"Here!" cried Paul, with a well-executed start; "you astonish me!"

"It has occurred to me within the last minute," said the doctor, "that there may be a very simple explanation of his flight. I observe you are giving a—a juvenile entertainment on a large scale."

"I suppose I am," Paul admitted. "And so you think——"

"I think that your son, who doubtless knew of your intention, was hurt at being excluded from the festivities, and, in a fit of mad, willful folly, resolved to be present at them in spite of you."

"My dear doctor," cried Paul, who saw the conveniences of this theory, "that must be it, of course—that explains it all!"

"So grave an act of insubordination," said the doctor, "an act of double disobedience—to your authority and mine—deserves the fullest punishment. You agree with me, I trust?"

The memory of his wrongs overcame Mr. Bultitude for the moment. "Nothing can be too bad for the little scoundrel!" he said, between his teeth.

"He shall have it, sir, I swear to you; he shall be made to repent this as long as he lives. This insult to me (and, of course, to you also) shall be amply atoned for. If you will have the goodness to deliver him over to my hands, I will carry him back at once to Rodwell Regis, and to-morrow, sir, to-morrow, I will endeavor to awaken his conscience in a way he will remember!"

The doctor was more angry than an impartial lover of justice might perhaps approve of, but then it must be remembered that he had seen himself completely outwitted and his authority set at naught in a very humiliating fashion.

However, his excessive wrath cooled Paul's own resentment instead of inflaming it; it made him reflect that, after all, it was he who had the best right to be angry.

"Well," he said, rather coldly, "we must find him first, and then consider what shall be done to him. If you will allow me I will ring and——"

But before he could lay his hand upon the bell, the library door opened, and Uncle Marmaduke made his appearance, dragging with him the unwilling Dick. The unfortunate boy was effectually sobered now—pale and trembling, and besmirched with coal-dust—in fact, in very much the same plight as his ill-used father had been in only three hours ago.

There was a brazen smile of triumph on Mr. Paradine's face as he met Paul's eyes with a knowing wink, which the latter did not at all understand.

Such audacity astonished him, for he could hardly believe that Paradine, after his perfidious conduct in the billiard-room, could have the clumsy impudence to try to propitiate him now.

"Here he is, my boy," shouted Paradine; "here's the scamp

who has given us all this trouble. He came into the billiard-room just now and told me who he was, but I would have nothing to do with him, of course. Not my business, as I told him at the time. Then (I think I have the pleasure of seeing Dr. Grimstone? just so)—well, then, you, sir, arrived—and he made himself scarce. But when I saw him in the act of making a bolt up the area, where he had been taking shelter apparently in the coal-celler, I thought it was time to interfere, and so I collared him. I have much pleasure in handing him over now to the proper authorities."

And, letting Dick go, he advanced toward his brother-in-law, still with the same odd expression of having a secret understanding with him, which made Paul's blood boil.

"Stand where you are, sir," said Paul to his son. "No, Dr. Grimstone, allow me—leave him to me for the present, please."

"That's much better," whispered Paradine, approvingly; "capital. Keep it up, my boy; keep it up! Papa's as quiet as a lamb now. Go on."

Then Paul understood; his worthy brother-in-law had not been present at the last transformation, and was under a slight misapprehension; he evidently imagined that he had by this last stroke made himself and Dick masters of the situation. It was time to undeceive him.

"Have the goodness to leave my house at once, will you?" he said, sternly.

"You young fool!" said Marmaduke, under his breath, "after all I've done for you, too! Is this your gratitude? You know you can't get on without me. Take care what you're about."

"If you can't see that the tables are turned at last," said Paul, slowly, "you're a duller knave than I take you to be."

Marmaduke started back with an oath. "It's a trick," he said, savagely; "you want to get rid of me."

"I certainly intend to," said Paul. "Are you satisfied? Do you want proofs—shall I give them? I did just now in the billiard-room."

Paradine went to Dick, and shook him angrily. "You young idiot!" he said, in a furious aside, "why didn't you tell me?" Why did you let me make a fool of myself like this for, eh?"

"I did tell you," muttered Dick, "only you wouldn't listen. It serves you just right!"

Marmaduke soon collected himself after this unexpected shock; he tried to shake Paul's hands with an airy geniality. "Only my little joke," he said, laughing; "ha, ha! I thought I should take you in! . . . Why, I knew it directly. . . . I've been working for you all the time—but it wouldn't have done to let you see my line."

"No," said Paul; "it was not a very straight one, as usual."

"Well," said Marmaduke, "I shouldn't have stopped Master Dick there if I hadn't been on your side, should I now? I knew you'd come out of it all right, but I had a difficult game to play, don't you know? I don't wonder that you didn't follow me just at first."

"You've lost your game," said Paul; "it's no use to say any more. So now, perhaps, you'll go?"

"Go, eh?" said Paradine, without showing much surprise at the failure of so very forlorn a hope; "oh, very well, just as you please of course. Let your poor wife's only brother go from your doors without a penny in the world; but I warn you that a trifle or so laid out in stopping my mouth would not be thrown away. Some editors would be glad enough of a sensation from real life just now, and I could tell some very odd tales about this little affair."

"Tell them, if a character for sanity is of no further use to you," said Paul. "Tell them to any one you can get to believe you—tell the crossing-sweeper and the policeman, tell your grandmother, tell the horse marines—it will amuse them. Only you shall tell them on the other side of my front door. Shall I call any one to show you out?"

Paradine saw his game was really played out, and swaggered insolently to the door. "Not on my account, I beg," he said. "Good-by, Paul, my boy; no more dissolving views! Good-by, my young friend Richard; it was good fun while it lasted, eh? like the Servian crown—always a pleasant reminiscence! Good-evening to you, doctor. By the way, for educational purposes let me recommend a 'Penang lawyer'—buy one as you go back for the boys—to show them you've been thinking of them!"

And, having little luggage to impede him, the front door closed upon him shortly afterward—this time forever.

When he had gone, Dick looked imploringly at his father, and then at the doctor, who, until Paradine's parting words had lashed him into fury again, had been examining the engravings on the walls with a studied delicacy during the recent painful scene, and was now leaning against the chimney-piece, with his arms folded and a sepulchral gloom on his brow.

"Richard," said Mr. Bultitude, in answer to the look, "you have not done much to deserve consideration at my hands."

"Or at mine!" added the doctor, ominously.

"No," said Dick, "I know I haven't. I've been a brute. I deserve a jolly good licking."

"You do," said his father, but, in spite of his indignation, the broken-down look of the boy and the memory of his own sensations when waiting to be caned that morning, moved him to pity. And then Dick had shown some compunction in the billiard-room; he was not entirely lost to feeling!

"Well," he said, at last, "you've acted very wrongly. Because I thought it best that you should not—ahem—leave your studies for this party, you chose to disobey me and alarm your master, by defying my orders and coming home by stealth—that was your object, I presume?"

"Y—yes," said Dick, looking rather puzzled, but seeing that he was expected to agree; "that was it."

"You know as well as I do what good cause I have to be angry; but, if I consent to overlook your conduct this time, if I ask Dr. Grimstone to overlook it, too," (the doctor made an inarticulate protest, while Dick stared, incredulous), "will you undertake to behave better for the future—will you?"

Dick's voice broke at this, and his eyes swam—he was effectually conquered. "Oh, I will!" he cried, "I will, really. I never meant to go so far when I began."

"Then, Dr. Grimstone," said Paul, "you will do me a great favor if you will take no further notice of this. You see the boy is sorry, and I am sure he will apologize to you amply for the grave slight he has done you. And, by the way—I should have mentioned it before—but he will have to leave your care at the end of the term for a public school—I intend to send him to Harrow—so he will require some additional preparation, perhaps; I may leave that in your hands?"

Dr. Grimstone looked deeply offended, but he only said, "I will see to that, myself, my dear sir. I am sorry you did not tell me this earlier. But, may I suggest that a large public school has its pitfalls for a boy of your son's disposition. And I trust this leniency may not have evil consequences, but I doubt it—I greatly doubt it."

As for Dick, he ran to his father and hung gratefully on to his arm with a remorseful hug, a thing he had never dared to do, or thought of attempting, in his life till then.

"Papa," he said, in a choked voice, "you're a brick! I don't deserve any of it, but I'll never forget this as long as I live."

Mr. Bultitude, too, felt something spring up in his heart which drew him toward the boy in an altogether novel manner, but no one will say that either was the worse for it.

"Well," he said, mildly, "prove to me that I have made no mistake. Go back to Crichton House now, work and play well, and try to keep out of mischief for the rest of the term. I trust to you," he added, in a lower tone, "while you remain at Rodwell Regis, to keep my—my connection with it a secret; you owe that at least to me. You may probably have —ahem, some inconveniences to put up with—inconveniences you are not prepared for. You must bear them as your punishment."

And soon afterward a cab was called, and Dr. Grimstone

prepared to return to Rodwell Regis, with the deserter, by the last train.

As Paul shook hands through the cab-window with his prodigal son, he repeated his warning. "Mind," he said, "*you* have been at school all this past week; you have run away to attend this party, you understand? Good-by, my boy, and here's something to put in your pocket, and—and another for Jolland; but he need not know it comes from me." And when Dick opened his hand afterward, he found two half-sovereigns in it.

So the cab rolled away, and Paul went up to the drawing-room, where, although he certainly allowed the fireworks on the balcony and in the garden to languish forgotten on their sticks, he led all the other revels up to an advanced hour with a jovial *abandon* quite worthy of Dick, and none of his little guests ever suspected the change of host.

When it was all over, and the sleepy children had driven off, Paul sat down in an easy chair by the bright fire, which sparkled frostily in his bedroom, to think gratefully over all the events of the day—events which were beginning already to take an unreal and fantastic shape.

Bitterly as he had suffered, and in spite of the just anger and thirst for revenge with which he had returned, I am glad to say he did not regret the spirit of mildness that had stayed his hand when his hour of triumph came.

His experiences, unpleasant as they had been, had had their advantages; they had drawn him and his family closer together.

In his daughter Barbara, as she wished him good-night (knowing nothing, of course, of the escape), he had suddenly become aware of a girlish freshness and grace he had never looked for or cared to see before. Roly, after this, too, had a claim upon him he could never wish to forget, and even with the graceless Dick there was a warmer and more natural feeling on both sides—a strange result, no doubt, of such unfilial behavior, but so it was.

Mr. Bultitude would never after this consider his family as a set of troublesome and thankless incumbrances; thanks to Dick's offices during the interregnum, they would henceforth throw off their reserve and constraint in their father's presence, and, in so doing, open his eyes to qualities of which he had hitherto been in contented ignorance.

* * * * * * * *

It would be pleasanter, perhaps, to take leave of Mr. Bultitude thus, as he sits by his bedroom fire in the first flush of supreme and unalloyed content.

But I feel almost bound to point out a fact which few will find any difficulty in accepting—namely, that, although the wrong had been retrieved without scandal or exposure, for which Paul could not be too thankful, there were many consequences which could not but survive it.

Neither father nor son found himself exactly in the same position as before the exchange of characters.

It took Mr. Bultitude considerable time and trouble to repair all the damage his son's boyish excesses had wrought both at Westbourne Terrace and in the city. He found the discipline of his clerks' room and counting-house sorely relaxed, and his office-boy in particular attempted a tone toward him of such atrocious familiarity that he was indignantly dismissed, much to his astonishment, the very first day. And probably Paul will never quite clear himself of the cloud that hangs over a man of business who, in the course of however well regulated a career, is known to have been at least once "a little odd."

And his home, too, was distinctly demoralized; his cook was an artist, unrivaled at soups and entrées; but he had to get rid of her, notwithstanding.

It was only too evident that she looked upon herself as the prospective mistress of his household, and he did not feel called upon as a parent to fulfill any expectations which Dick's youthful cupboard-love had unintentionally excited.

For some time, as fresh proof of Dick's extravagances came home to him, Paul found it cost no little effort to restrain a tendency to his former bitterness and resentment, but he valued the new understanding between himself and his son too highly to risk losing it again by any open reproach, and so with each succeeding discovery the victory over his feelings became easier.

As for Dick, he found the inconveniences at which his father had hinted anything but imaginary, as will perhaps be easily understood.

It was an unpleasant shock to discover that in one short week his father had contrived somehow to procure him a lasting popularity. He was obviously looked upon by all, masters and boys, as a confirmed coward and sneak. And although some of his companions could not fairly reproach him on the latter score, the imputation was particularly galling to Dick, who had always treated such practices with sturdy contempt.

He was sorely tempted at times to right himself by declaring the real state of the case; but he remembered his promise and his father's unexpected clemency, and his gratitude always kept him silent.

He never quite understood how it was that the whole school seemed to have an impression that they could kick and assault

him generally with perfect impunity; but a few very unsuccessful experiments convinced him that this was a popular error on their part.

Although, however, in everything else he did gradually succeed in recovering all the ground his father had lost him, yet there was one respect in which, I am sorry to say, he found all his efforts to retrieve himself hopeless.

His pretty princess, with the gray eyes and soft brown hair, cruelly refused to have anything more to do with him. For Dulcie's pride had been wounded by what she considered his shameless perfidy on that memorable Saturday by the parallel bars, and the last lingering traces of affection had vanished before Paul's ingratitude on the following Monday, and she never forgave him.

She did not even give him an opportunity of explaining himself, never by word or sign, up to the last day of the term, showing that she was even aware of his return. What was worse, in her resentment she transferred her favor to Tipping, who became her humble slave for a too brief period; after which he was found wanting in polish, and was ignominiously thrown over for the shy new boy Kiffin, whose head Dick found a certain melancholy pleasure in punching in consequence.

This was Dick's punishment, and a very real and heavy one he found it. He is at Harrow now, where he is doing fairly well; but I think there are moments even yet when Dulcie's charming little face, her pretty confidences, and her chilling disdain, are remembered with something as nearly resembling a heartache as a healthy, unsentimental boy can allow himself.

Perhaps, if some day he goes back once more to Crichton House "to see the fellows," this time with the mysterious glamour of a great public school about him, he may yet obtain forgiveness, for she is getting horribly tired of Kiffin, who, to tell the truth, is something of a milksop.

As for the Garudâ Stone, I really can not say what has become of it. Perhaps it was dashed to pieces on the cobblestones of the stables behind the terrace, and a good thing too. Perhaps it was not, and is still in existence, with all its dangerous power as ready for use as ever it was; and in that case the best I can wish my readers is, that they may be mercifully preserved from finding it anywhere, or if they are unfortunate enough to come upon it, that they may at least be more careful with it than Mr. Paul Bultitude, by whose melancholy example I trust they will take timely warning.

And with these very severe wishes I beg to bid them a reluctant farewell.

THE END.

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